

IVAN FRANKO

WHEN THE ANIMALS COULD TALK







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THE
ANIMALS
COULD TALK**

FABLES



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ІВАН ФРАНКО
КОЛИ ЩЕ ЗВІРІ ГОВОРИЛИ

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THE DONKEY AND THE LION

Once upon a time there was a Donkey. He suddenly decided that he had had enough of hard work and beatings from his master.

"I know," he thought, "I'll flee to the forest and live in freedom! I'll graze on the forest grass and who will there be to prevent it?"

So without thinking too long, he ran away from his master into the forest. He was very happy there. He grazed wherever he wanted to, didn't have to work, nobody beat him — in all his born days he had never lived so well. But one day, while grazing, he looked up and saw the Lion, frightening beyond description, coming straight toward him.

"Oh!" thought the Donkey. "This will probably be the end of me!"

But while the Lion was approaching, he somehow came to his senses and began to consider a way out.

"Maybe I can outwit him in some way?"

And right where he stood, he suddenly fell to the ground, and lay there as if without a care in the world. The Lion approached and began roaring out while still at a distance:

"Hey, you, who might you be? How dare you lie there when I'm approaching? Why aren't you getting up to bow to me?"

The Donkey continued to lie there as if we didn't hear. He lay quietly, only flapping his long ears from time to time.

The Lion came closer and roared again:

"Get up immediately and salute me!"

"And who might you be?" asked the Donkey.

"You are asking yet?" the Lion roared threateningly. "Don't you know that I am the Lion, King of all the beasts?"

Without rising, the Donkey raised his head, and goggled his eyes at him.

"What kind of nonsense is this you're talking?" he asked. "You are king of all the beasts? Who told you such a thing? Do you have it in writing? Who elected you to be king? Well, speak up!"

The Lion stood as if he had been stunned.

“Who told me so? Why, everyone tells me that I am king of the beasts. Are you saying that it isn’t true?”

“Of course it’s not true! It can’t be true, because I am the king of all the beasts!”

“You?” the Lion was dumbfounded. “And I suppose you have this in writing?”

“Of course I have! Here, take a look!”

He rose to his feet and turning his back to the Lion, he showed him his hind hoof where a very new horseshoe gleamed.

“See this! This is my royal seal. If you were king you’d have one like it.”

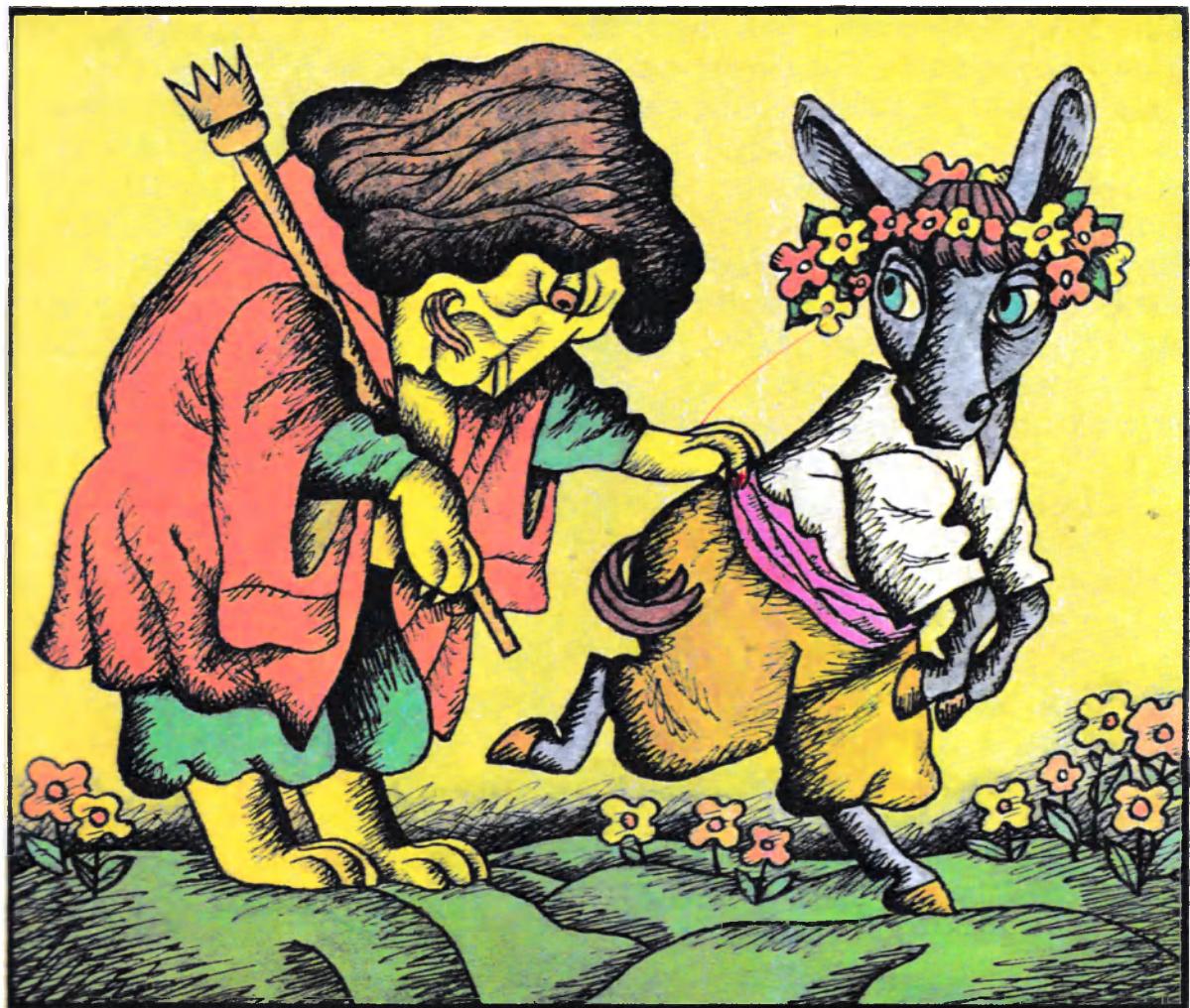
“How astonishing!” marvelled the Lion. “I have never even thought about such a thing. You’re probably right. But wait! Let’s have a contest. We’ll go into the forest and the one who catches more animals within an hour is the true king.”

“Fine, if that’s the way you wish it,” said the Donkey, and with that they went their separate ways.

The Lion raced quickly around the forest; he ran and ran, catching a doe here, a rabbit there, another animal further on — in an hour he had collected some five or six animals. He gathered them all up and dragged them back to the Donkey.

But what was the Donkey doing in the meantime? He strolled out onto a broad clearing, where the sun shone brightly, and on reaching the centre, threw himself down on the ground, stretched out his legs, closed his eyes and lolled his long tongue out of his mouth as far as it would go. Anyone looking at him would have sworn he was dead — very dead. Over the clearing there was a constant flow of flying birds — hawks, crows, kites, magpies, ravens — all the nastiest kind. Seeing the Donkey lying there dead they descended on him in a mob. At first they hopped about at a distance, and when they saw that he wasn’t moving, they began to light on him and peck at his tongue and his eyes. The Donkey lay quietly, only when one of the birds came too close did he clamp it between his teeth or knock it with his hoof, killing it and hiding it under his body so cunningly that the others didn’t even notice it. Before an hour had passed he had killed at least a score. Then he sprang to his feet, shook himself so vigorously and brayed so loudly that the birds scattered in all directions. He then gathered up all his killed birds and took them to the spot where he was to meet the Lion. The Lion was already there, waiting for him.

“Well, now,” he said to the Donkey, showing him his prey. “See how many I have killed?”



"Now aren't you the stupid one!" answered the Donkey, kicking at the dead animals. "I could have caught at least two-score of such animals, but what are they worth? Now just you look at mine! I caught only those that fly in the air. You try to do it!"

"No, I'm not up to such a trick," answered the Lion. "At last I can see that you are truly the king of the beasts, not I. Forgive me for being so disrespectful toward you."

"Ha!" said the Donkey, haughtily. "You must always be respectful, because you may suddenly meet someone who is your superior, and then what? I could now punish you immediately with death, but I'll forgive you because you did this out of ignorance and not from ill-will. Go now, and be more careful another time!"

And the Lion went, dejected, his tail between his legs as if someone had poured a barrel of ice-cold water over him. But neither near, nor too far away, he met Brother Wolf in the forest.

"Good health to you, most illustrious King!" greeted the Wolf, bowing low.

"Ekh, go away and don't make fun of me!" answered the Lion sadly. "What kind of a king am I?"

"What do you mean?" yelped the Wolf. "Who would dare to say otherwise?"

"Quiet, brother," whispered the Lion. "The true king is not far from here. If he hears us, it will be bad for both you and me."

"The true king?" the Wolf was startled. "What is this? Who else could be the true king but yourself?"

"There is, there is!" the Lion whispered in terror. "I saw him myself. He is terrifying! And what strength! He can even catch the animals that fly in the air. I thank God that he let me go alive."

"Is that so?" the Wolf was amazed. "Stranger and stranger! I know this forest intimately and I can't think of who this could be? How does this king look?"

"In a word — terrifying!" said the Lion. "His ears are like this, his head like a bucket and the royal seal on his hind leg."

"For the life of me, I can't guess who this could be," worried the Wolf. "You know what, come and show him to me."

"Me? Never in the world!" shouted the Lion. "It's enough that I was frightened once!"

"Oh, come now! What is there to be afraid of?" encouraged the Wolf.

"You know what, let's tie our tails together and then we can approach him with more courage."

"Oh well!" agreed the Lion. "Let it be as you say."

So they tied their tails together and off they went. They climbed up on a hilltop overlooking the clearing where the Donkey was grazing. The Lion stopped, looked, then whispered to the Wolf:

"There he is! There he is! Look!"

The Wolf turned, took a look, and yelped: "You foolish Lion, why that's just an old Ass!" But to the Lion it sounded as if he said that they must get away fast and he became so frightened that he took to his heels! Over stumps, over streams — he ran as fast as his breath would let him. Finally he was so tired that he stopped and looked behind him.

"Now Wolf," he asked, "have we escaped far enough?"

But the Wolf was beyond speech, his tongue hanging out. Since he was tied to the Lion's tail, he was dragged all the way and had long ceased to breath.

"See," said the Lion, "you said that the new king wasn't terrifying, but when you saw him for yourself you died from fright!"



HOW PAST FAVOURS ARE FORGOTTEN

Brother Wolf rambled around the forest, and while on his rambles one day, he ran into serious trouble. He was seen by a group of young hunters who, immediately on seeing him, gave chase. The Wolf ran and ran through the forest, then finally emerged on a beaten pathway. At that moment a man was walking along it, coming from the field carrying a sack and a flail. The Wolf approached him:

"Dearest Uncle! Take pity on me and hide me in your sack! There's a group of hunters out to get me, wanting to shorten my life."

The man took pity on him, put him in his sack, threw it over his shoulder, and walked on. Presently the hunters came up and one said:

"Would you have seen, my good man, a Wolf along this path?"

"No, I haven't."

The hunters sped on. When they had passed out of sight, the Wolf spoke up:

“Have my pursuers gone?”

“Yes, they’re gone.”

“Well then, you can now release me from the sack.”

The man untied the sack and released brother Wolf. The Wolf then said:

“Now, my good man, I’m going to eat you!”

“Oh, brother Wolf, good brother Wolf! I’ve saved you from sure death, and you want to eat me?”

“Why not, my man! That’s how things are in this world. Past favours are always forgotten!”

The man saw that he was in a bad situation, so he suggested: “Well, if that’s the way it is, let’s go on! We’ll go to court. If the court agrees to what you say, then it will be as you say: you can eat me.”

The Wolf consented and they went on till they met an old Mare. The man turned to her and said:

“If you please, mother Mare, decide for us. I have just saved brother Wolf from a dangerous adventure, and now he wants to eat me.” And he told the Mare the whole story as it had happened. The Mare thought and thought, then said:

“The Wolf is right, my good man! I lived with my master twelve years; served him faithfully and well, raised him ten colts, and now that I have grown old and am not able to work, he has turned me out into a barren field so the wolves could make a meal of me. It’s now a week that I’ve spent here, days and nights, waiting for the wolves to come and tear me apart. That’s the way it is, Uncle, past favours are soon forgotten!”

“You see, I’m right!” cried the Wolf.

Saddened, the man began to plead with the Wolf that they seek another judgement. The Wolf agreed. They walked on and on till they came across an old Dog. The man turned to him with his problem. He told him the whole story just as it happened. The Dog thought and thought, then said finally:

“No, my good man, the truth lies with the Wolf. Just listen to my story. I served my master twenty years, guarded his home and cattle, but when I got old and my voice gave way, he chased me out of his yard and now you see me wandering about without shelter. Past favours are forgotten, it’s the sacred truth!”

“You see, it’s just as I said!” cried the Wolf.

The man was even more saddened by this turn of events and again begged of the Wolf:



"Do allow me to get one more opinion and then do with me what you will, since you don't recognize a good turn."

"Very well."

So they went on until they saw sister Vixen approaching them in the distance.

"Hey, sister Vixen!" shouted the man from afar and bowed. "Do us a favour and come closer, help us in a decision between the Wolf and myself!"

The Vixen came up and the man told her the whole story just as it happened. The Vixen couldn't believe it.

"It can't be the truth, my good man, that the Wolf, who prises himself on being such a gentleman, would crawl into a sack!"

"But it is the truth!" cried the Wolf.

"No, I'll never believe it!" said the Vixen stubbornly and no matter how the man swore or the Wolf tried to convince her, she refused to believe them.

"I can't believe it, unless you show me how it was done."

"Yes, that we can," said the man, and opened up the sack in the same way as when he hid the Wolf in it.

"See, this is the way it was done!" said the Wolf, putting his head into the sack.

"What do you mean, you only put your head in?" asked the Vixen. The Wolf crawled completely into the sack.

"Now then, my good man," said the Vixen, "show me how you tied the sack."

The man tied the sack.

"And now, my good man, show me how you threshed the sheaves on the threshing floor."

The man didn't have to be told twice. He seized his flail and away he went at the sack! The Vixen continued to encourage him: "Now show me how you turned the sheaves?"

The man turned the sack and flailel at the other side, striking the Wolf on the head till he beat him to death.

"Now, my good man," said the Vixen, "I have saved you from death. How are you going to repay me for this?"

"I'll present you, sister Vixen, with a sack of chickens."

"Good."

The Vixen followed the man into the village and waited outside his gate while he went into the barn to look for chickens. He took a sack and started to catch the chickens when his wife appeared.

"What on earth are you doing, husband?"



The man told her everything that had happened, how the Vixen had saved his life and how he had promised to repay her with a sack of chickens.

"Thank goodness you're alive and well," said his wife, "but to give the Vixen our chickens I will never agree. Better you should put our two Dogs — Lysko and Riabko — in the sack and give them to the Vixen."

The man thought this over and decided to take his wife's advice. He put the Dogs into the sack, carried them out to the gate and said:

"Here it is, sister Vixen, your sack of chickens. Take it into the forest on your back and don't open it near the village, or they'll scatter."

The Vixen took the sack. She carried and bore its heavy weight till she got tired and sat down on a mound beyond the village to rest. While resting, she thought:

"I'll just take a look to see how many chickens he gave me." She opened the sack and before she could even take a peep, the Dogs, Lysko and Riabko, jumped out and went after her. The Vixen ran with all her strength and barely-barely reached the forest and her burrow ahead of them.

After getting over her fright and getting back her breath, she began a conversation with herself:

"You, my eyes, what were you doing while those nasty Dogs were chasing me?"

"We looked carefully so that you would find the best way to run to get away from the Dogs."

"And you, my legs, what were you doing?"

"We ran with all our might so that the Dogs couldn't catch up with you."

“And you, my ears, what were you doing?”

“We listened with attention to hear if your enemies were gaining on you.”

“And you, my outsized tail, what were you doing?”

The tail, deeply insulted at the disrespectful way she addressed him, answered her with spite:

“Oh, I swung back and forth, getting caught in the tree stumps or in the bushes to impede your way so that the Dogs could catch you.”

“Hah, so that’s what you’re like?” howled the Vixen, “out of my burrow with you!”

And with these words she turned and thrust her tail outside her burrow, shouting:

“Hey Lysko, hey Riabko! Here! Here! Here is the Vixen’s tail! Tear at it!”

As if waiting for this, Lysko and Riabko grabbed the Vixen’s tail and gave it such a sharp pull that they pulled the Vixen herself out of the burrow and there and then tore her to pieces.



THE VIXEN AND THE CRANE

The Vixen and the Crane became very good friends, even to the point of becoming godparents to each other’s children. One day the Vixen invited the Crane over for lunch.

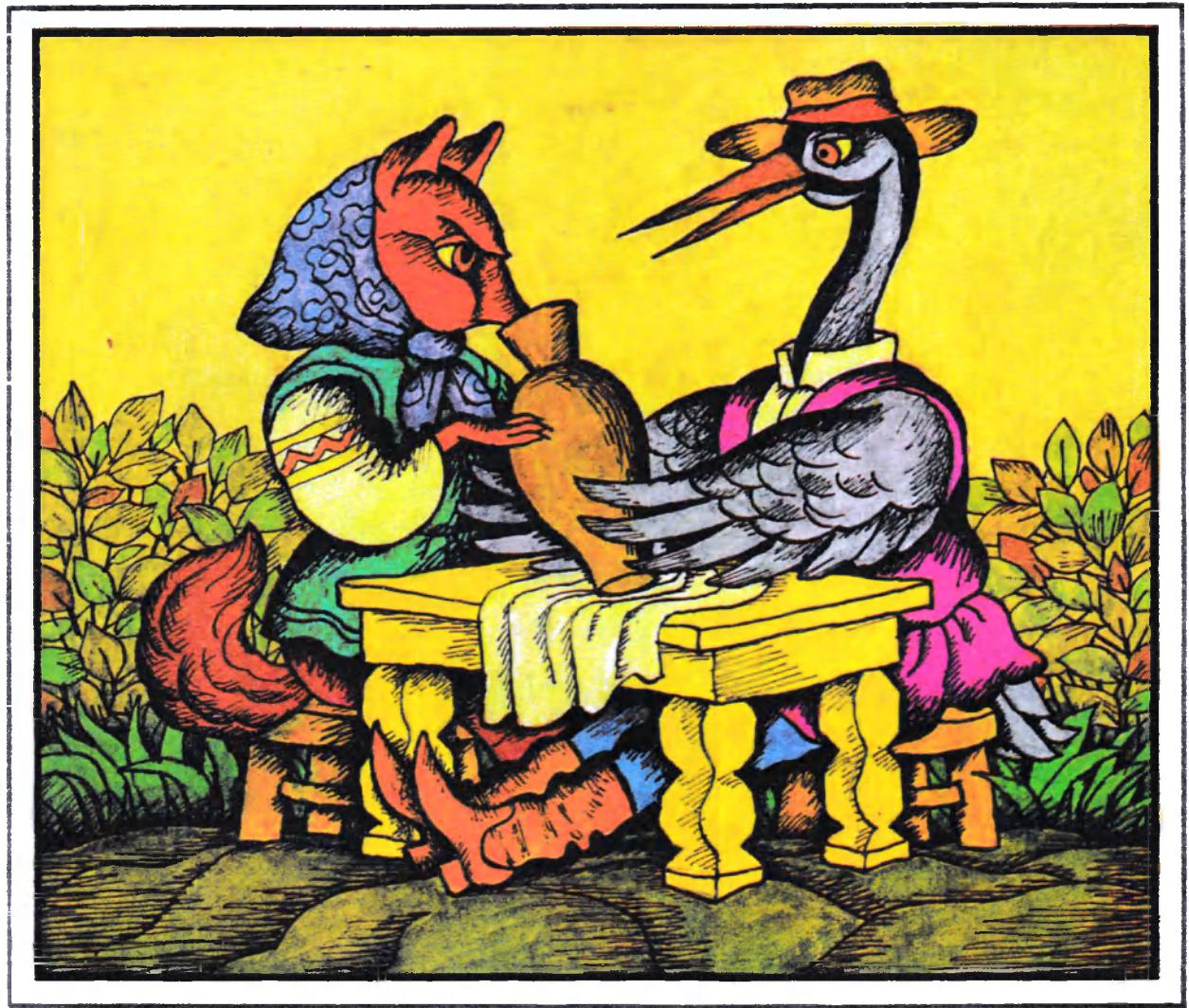
“Do come, dear friend! Do come, love! All my house has to offer will be yours.”

The Crane arrived in good time. The Vixen had prepared a meal of porridge with milk, spread it thinly over a plate, and placed it before her friend.

“Do help yourself, old friend, don’t be proud! I prepared it myself.”

The Crane pecked and pecked at the porridge with her long beak, but was unable to get a bite. In the meantime the Vixen licked away at the porridge till she ate it all. When it was all gone, she said:

“Do forgive me, friend, for I have nothing else to offer you.”



"I thank you for even this," answered the Crane, dryly, "now how about visiting me tomorrow."

"Very well, my dear, I'll come, and why not?" answered the Vixen.

Next day the Vixen arrived to a meal of meat, beets, beans and potatoes prepared by the Crane. She had cut everything up into small pieces and placed it all into a tall earthen crock with a narrow neck and placed it on the table before the Vixen.

"Do help yourself, my dear, don't be proud, love!" the Crane begged hospitably.

The Vixen sniffed — it all smelled so good! She stuck her nose into the crock, but it wouldn't go in! She tried using her paw, but with no success either. She circled the pot in one direction, then the other — there was no way she could get at the food. The Crane, in the meantime, didn't waste a moment. She reached easily into the crock with her long beak, pulling out one piece after another and swallowing them with a fine appetite till everything was gone.

"Do forgive me, friend," she said, having emptied the crock, "you were welcome to all my house had to offer, but I have no more."

The Vixen was so angry that she left without even thanking her hostess. She had thought, you see, that she would have eaten her fill for a week, and here she was, going home, having been neatly paid back by the Crane. From that time on, the Vixen gave up her friendship with the Crane.



THE FOX AND THE BLACKBIRD

A wild Boar was on his way to the market in Kiev one day, when he met a Wolf coming toward him.

"Where are you going, Boar?" asked the Wolf.

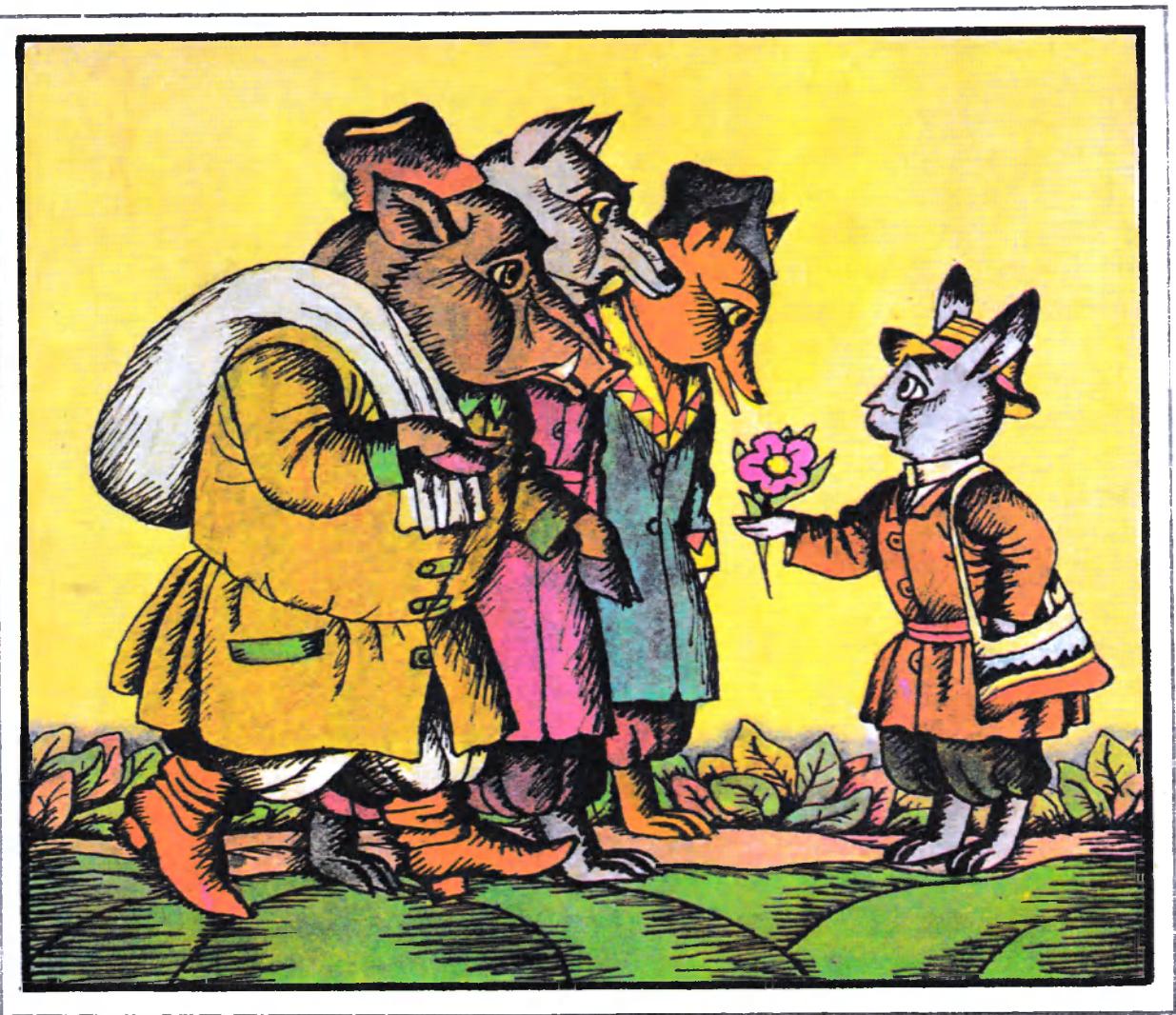
"To the market in Kiev."

"Take me with you."

"Come along, old crony."

They walked along till they met the Fox coming toward them.

"Where are you going, Boar?"



“To the market in Kiev.”

“Take me with you.”

“Come along, old crony.”

They walked along till they met the Rabbit coming toward them.

“Where are you going, Boar?”

“To the market in Kiev.”

“Take me with you.”

“Come along, you poor creature.”

So they walked along together. They walked and walked until, just before nightfall, they came upon a hole in the ground, wide and deep. The Boar jumped and missed, and after him came the others, all of them landing in the bottom of the pit. What to do? They would have to spend the night there. They got very hungry after a while, but they couldn't get out and there was nothing to eat in the pit. The Fox had an idea.

“Let's,” he said, “sing songs. Whichever one of us will hit the highest note, that one we will eat.”

Well, they started to sing. The Wolf, of course, was the lowest: Oo-oo-oo!; the Boar was a little higher: O-o-o!; the Fox was still higher: E-e-e!; and the Rabbit came out the highest: Ee-ee-ee!

They all threw themselves at the wretched Rabbit, tearing him to pieces and eating him. But really, the Rabbit was much too small to appease their hunger. It had barely dawned in the morning when they woke up so hungry that they could barely breath. Again the Fox suggested:

“Let's continue singing. This time the one who has the lowest voice will be eaten.”

They began to sing. The Wolf tried his best to sing in a high voice, but failed miserably. His howl was the lowest. The others threw themselves at him and tore him to pieces.

Only two were left: the Boar and the Fox. They divided the Wolf between them. The Boar quickly ate his share, while the Fox ate only a little and hid the rest. A day passed, another, the Boar was getting hungrier and hungrier and there was nothing to eat. The Fox just sat in his corner, pulling out one piece of the wolf meat at a time and eating it.

“What is it you're eating, old friend?” asked the Boar.

“Ah, old crony,” sighed the Fox, “what can I do! I'm drinking my own blood out of hunger. Why don't you do the same thing? Take a bite out of your chest and suck the blood out slowly. You'll see that you'll feel much better.”

The foolish Boar followed this advice. He dug his tusks into his chest, tore it open, but before he got to even tasting his own blood he was flooded with it and died then and there. Now the Fox threw himself on him and had something to eat for another few days. But soon even the Boar's meat was gone. The Fox sat in the pit again tormented by hunger.

Now there was a tree standing over the pit and in the tree the Blackbird was building its nest. The Fox watched it, looking up out of the pit, and at last began to speak:

“What are you doing there, Blackbird?”

“Making a nest.”

“What do you need a nest for?”

“I'll lay eggs in it.”

“What do you need eggs for?”

“I'll hatch some baby Blackbirds.”

“Blackbird, if you don't get me out of this pit, I'll eat up your children.”

“Don't eat them, dear Fox, I'll get you out of there right away,” begged the Blackbird.

The Blackbird was distressed, the Blackbird worried. How was she to get the Fox out of the pit? She began by flying swiftly about the forest gathering up small sticks and twigs and throwing them down into the pit. She worked very hard and after some time the Fox was able to climb out of the pit over the pile of twigs. The Blackbird thought that now the Fox would go on his way, but no! The Fox laid himself down beneath the Blackbird's tree and said:

“Blackbird, you've gotten me out of that pit.”

“Yes, I have.”

“Well now, find me something to eat or I'll eat your children.”

“Don't eat them, dear Fox. I'll get you something to eat.”

The Blackbird was distressed, the Blackbird worried. How was she to get food for the Fox? At last she thought of something and said to the Fox:

“Come with me.”

They came out of the forest and there at its edge wound a field path.

“Lie down here in the rye,” said the Blackbird to the Fox, “while I think about what to feed you with.”

Soon the Blackbird saw a woman coming along the path carrying lunch for the husband who was working in the field. The Blackbird jumped into a puddle, wet herself thoroughly, then into the sand,

covering herself with it, then began running up and down the path, flitting back and forth as if she couldn't fly. The woman saw that the bird was wet and helpless.

"I know," she thought, "I'll catch the bird and take it home as a plaything for the children."

She ran after the Blackbird for a while who also ran and flitted, but didn't fly. At last she laid down her basket with its pots of food on the path and began to chase the Blackbird in earnest. The Blackbird ran a bit, then flitted a bit, but always further and further away from the path, the woman following. At last, seeing that she had taken the woman some distance away from her basket, the bird lifted herself into the air and flew away. The woman, annoyed, waved an arm and returned to her basket. But there she found a real feast. While she was running after the Blackbird, the Fox had jumped out of the rye and to the pots. He ate everything he could, spilled the rest, and ran away.

The Blackbird returned to the tree and continued building her nest when, looking down, she saw the Fox under the tree again.

"Blackbird," said the Fox, "didn't you get me out of that pit?"

"I did, dear Fox."

"And you've fed me."

"Yes, I have."

"Well now, get me something to drink or I'll eat all your children."

"Don't eat them, dear Fox, I'll get you something to drink."

Again the Blackbird worried. How was she to get the Fox something to drink? At last she thought of something and said to the Fox: "Come with me!"

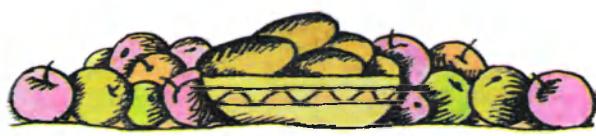
They came out of the forest again and onto the same field path.

"Lie down here in the rye," said the Blackbird to the Fox, "while I think of how I'll get you something to drink."

Soon the Blackbird saw a man coming down the path driving a barrel of water on his wagon to water his cabbages with. The Blackbird flew up, sat on the horse's head, and began to peck.

"Shoo!" shouted the man and swung his whip at the Blackbird. The Blackbird took flight and the whip hit the horse on the head. As if nothing had happened the Blackbird returned and this time sat on the other horse's head and began to peck at it. Again the man swung his whip and again swatted the horse on the head. This made the man very angry. "What a jailbird it is!" he thought. "Why has it attached itself to us?"

The Blackbird in the meantime had returned to sit on the barrel of water and pecked away there.



"Just you wait," thought the man, and suddenly pulling a gun out from under the seat, he shot at the barrel. He didn't hit the Blackbird, but the barrel toppled over from the heavy blow and fell to the ground, spilling the water which ran in a heavy stream along the path. The Fox jumped out of the rye, drank his fill, and the man, cursing the Blackbird, picked up the empty barrel and drove home.

The Blackbird returned to the tree and went on building her nest when, looking down, saw the Fox. There he was again — under the tree.

"Blackbird, you got me out of that pit?"

"Yes, I did."

"You fed me?"

"Yes, I did."

"You've watered me?"

"Yes, I did."

"Well now, make me laugh, for if you don't by God, I'll eat up your children alive!"

"Don't eat them, dear Fox, I'll make you laugh."

The Blackbird was again distressed and worried. How was she to make the Fox laugh? At last she thought of something and said: "Come with me."

They emerged out of the forest and onto the path along it. The Fox sat down in the rye and waited, when came the very same man who had earlier driven along with the water. He sat on the seat in front of the wagon and his small son sat behind him holding a stick. The Blackbird flew up, sat on the man's shoulder, and began to peck at him.

"Hey, dad," said the boy, "there's a bird sitting on you! Don't move, I'll chase it away."

The man had barely understood what his son was saying when the lad gave a huge swing with his stick — and whacked his father across his back! The Blackbird flicked away and a moment later settled on the man's other shoulder. The boy swung again and gave his father an even harder whack across his back.

"Son, son, what are you doing?" cried the father.

"Quiet, dad! There's some bird always trying to sit down on your shoulder. I've got to catch it!"

"Well, catch it, but don't beat me!" the father cried out in his pain.

The Blackbird flew about a bit, then suddenly lighted on the old man's head and began to peck at his straw hat as if this was her rightful place. The boy swung his arm to try and catch the bird, but

the Blackbird spurted away. She came down again and again and the boy tried his best to catch her — but in vain.

“Just you wait, you fiendish bird, I’ll get you yet!” thought the boy. And when the Blackbird lighted on his father’s head for the third time, without thinking a moment, he swung his stick across his father’s head with such strength that the world turned dark before the old man’s eyes. The Blackbird spurted up and flew away unharmed. The Fox, sitting in the rye, watched all this and held onto his sides with laughter at the Blackbird’s tricks.

The Blackbird, seeing the Fox so happy, breathed a sigh of relief.

“Well,” she thought, “maybe now he will give me some peace and won’t threaten my children.”

But she had barely returned to the tree and started on building her nest again, when the Fox once more appeared beneath her.

“Blackbird, did you, or did you not, get me out of that pit?”

“That I did.”

“Then you fed me.”

“I did.”

“You gave me water?”

“I did.”

“You made me laugh?”

“I did.”

“Well now, I want you to frighten me, and if you don’t I’ll eat all your children, I will.”

The Blackbird worried herself sick. How was she to frighten the Fox? At last she said:

“What else can I do? Come with me and I’ll do my best to frighten you.”

The Blackbird led the Fox along the forest road to the big pasture where a large flock of sheep were grazing. The shepherds were sitting in a hut nearby and the dogs ran about the flock, keeping watch. The Fox stopped some distance away, on the edge of the forest, for on seeing the dogs, he refused to go further.

“What, my dear Fox, are you afraid?”

“No, I’m not afraid,” answered the Fox, “I’m only a bit tired and don’t want to go any further.”

“Then how can I frighten you if you refuse to go further?” asked the Blackbird.

“Frighten me in any way you will,” said the Fox. “Just remember that if you don’t, I’ll eat your children, bones and all.”

“Very well,” said the Blackbird. “Lie down here in the rye and

watch me. When you start getting frightened, shout for me to stop."

The Blackbird flew off, then lighted down on the ground before the dogs and began to scratch the earth with her claws. The dogs sprang at it, but she flitted away and immediately came down again, but a little closer to the Fox. The Fox watched and waited to see what would happen, but didn't notice that the dogs were coming closer and closer. At last the Blackbird rose from the ground and fluttering its wings as if wounded, began to fly straight toward the Fox, the dogs in full pursuit. Only now did the Fox realize the danger and jumping up, shouted to the Blackbird:

"What are you doing, you fool! Why you are leading those dogs right at me!"

Here the dogs caught sight of him and dashed at him in full cry. The Fox barely managed to run a few steps when they caught up and tore him to pieces.

As you can see — he who deals in cunning and deceit, will also meet his end by deceit.

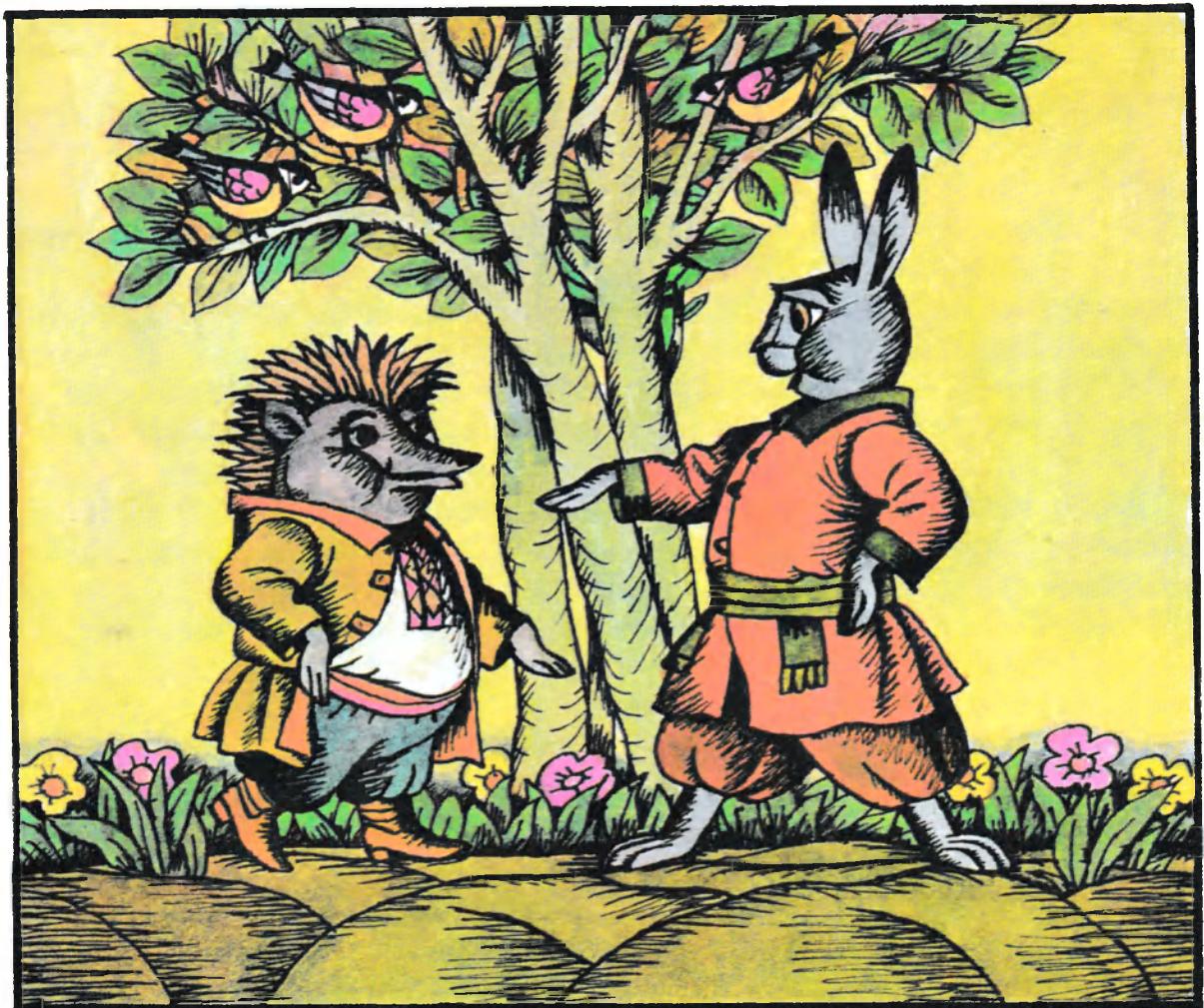


THE HEDGEHOG AND THE RABBIT

The Hedgehog stood outside the door of his burrow, his hands stuffed under his belt, his nose turned toward the warm breeze, humming a quiet tune. Whether it was a tuneful tune, was really nobody's business — he hummed as only he knew how. So he hummed, until a thought came into his mind:

"Why don't I stroll out to the field while my wife is dressing the children in clean shirts? It will be a walk, and I'll take a look at my beets, to see how they are coming up."

The beets weren't far from his burrow house. The Hedgehog helped himself to as many as he needed for his family, and that is why he thought of them as "my beets." So thinking, he closed the door behind him and trudged along the pathway to the field. He hadn't gone far when he saw the Rabbit coming toward him. He had also come out for a walk to take a look at "his" cabbages.



Coming face to face with him, the Hedgehog offered a polite greeting. But the Rabbit was a very proud creature and thought himself quite superior to the Hedgehog. He didn't reply to the greeting, just looked down his nose at him from his greater height and said:

"Oho, and what are you up to, loafing about in the field so early in the morning?"

"I'm taking a walk," answered the Hedgehog.

"A walk?" the Rabbit burst out laughing. "I would think that with your crooked legs you'd be more comfortable lying down, rather than walking!"

This unfeeling jeer made the Hedgehog very angry, for his legs, in truth, were rather crooked.

"I suppose you think," he answered, "that with your longer paws, you could run faster than I can?"

"Of course!" said the Rabbit. "There is no question about it!"

"Well, let's make a bet and run a race, and we'll see if I don't win."

"People would think it a big joke if we told them. You with your crooked legs outrunning me?" laughed the Rabbit. "As far as I am concerned, we can try, if you want to. Let's race."

"Well, there's no need to rush into it," answered the Hedgehog. "I would like first to go home, have a bite of breakfast, and then meet you here, say in half an hour."

So it was agreed.

Returning home, the Hedgehog said to his wife:

"Wife, get dressed quickly and come out to the field with me."

"Why should I go out to the field?" asked Mrs. Hedgehog.

"Well, you see, the Rabbit and I are going to race each other."

"What, have you suddenly lost your mind," cried Mrs. Hedgehog, "to want to run a race with the Rabbit?"

"No I haven't," replied the Hedgehog with dignity. "I've got to do it, and you must help me."

What was Mrs. Hedgehog to do? She got dressed and went along with her husband.

While on the way, the Hedgehog gave her instructions:

"See this long field. This is where we are going to have the race. We will start from the top of the field. The Rabbit will run along one furrow and I will run along the other. Now you stand right here, by this furrow, and when the Rabbit comes in sight, you step out and shout:

'I'm here already!'



Leaving his wife at the right spot, the Hedgehog went along the furrow to the other end. The Rabbit was already there, waiting.

"Well, are we ready to run?" he asked. "Now, one... two..." He stood in one furrow and the Hedgehog in the next. The Rabbit shouted "three!" and was off along his furrow like the wind.

But the Hedgehog ran but a few steps, then, after sitting down a bit, went leisurely back to the starting place. The Rabbit ran with all his might, and as he approached the other end of the field, the Hedgehog's wife stepped out into the other furrow and shouted toward him:

"I'm here already!"

The Rabbit's eyes popped with surprise; it never even occurred to him that this wasn't the same hedgehog, for as we know, hedgehogs are very much alike in appearance.

"How could this be?" he cried, astonished. "Let's race once more back to the other end!"

And without giving himself time to take a deep breath, he turned and rushed back along the furrow, his ears lying flat on his back. Mrs. Hedgehog remained quietly behind. When the Rabbit approached the other end of the field, Mr. Hedgehog stepped forward, shouting toward him as he approached:

"I'm here already!"

The Rabbit was furious. How could it have happened that the crooked-legged Hedgehog had beaten him in a race? And without thinking, in his anger, he shouted:

"Let's race again!"

"Whatever you say," answered the Hedgehog calmly. "We can race ten times, as far as I am concerned."

Away went the Rabbit, and again at the lower end of the field he heard:

“I’m here already!”

He turned once more to race back up to the head of the field and there again he heard these words repeated. So the poor fellow ran and ran, at least seventy-three times — back and forth, back and forth — and in every case the Hedgehog was “already there.” As soon as he arrived at one or the other end he heard “I’m here already!” On the seventy-fourth time around he was unable to finish. He collapsed in the very middle of his run and died from exhaustion. The Hedgehog gave his wife a shout and they both returned to their home in the burrow, where they live happily to this day if they haven’t passed away.

Since then not a single rabbit has ever attempted to race a hedgehog.

And as for you, young readers, this story offers a lesson: never try to make a fool of anyone weaker than yourself!



THE WOLF AS A REEVE

Once upon a time a Donkey was grazing in a meadow and slowly neared the forest as he grazed. Here, the Wolf, who was hiding behind a stump, jumped out from behind his hiding place, preparing to tear the Donkey apart. But the Donkey, though he was considered a fool, immediately thought of what he must do to save himself. As the Wolf ran toward him he smiled radiantly, bowed low to him, and said:

“Oh, good, good, Mr. Wolf, that you have come. I’ve been looking and looking for you!”

“What would you need me for?” asked the Wolf.

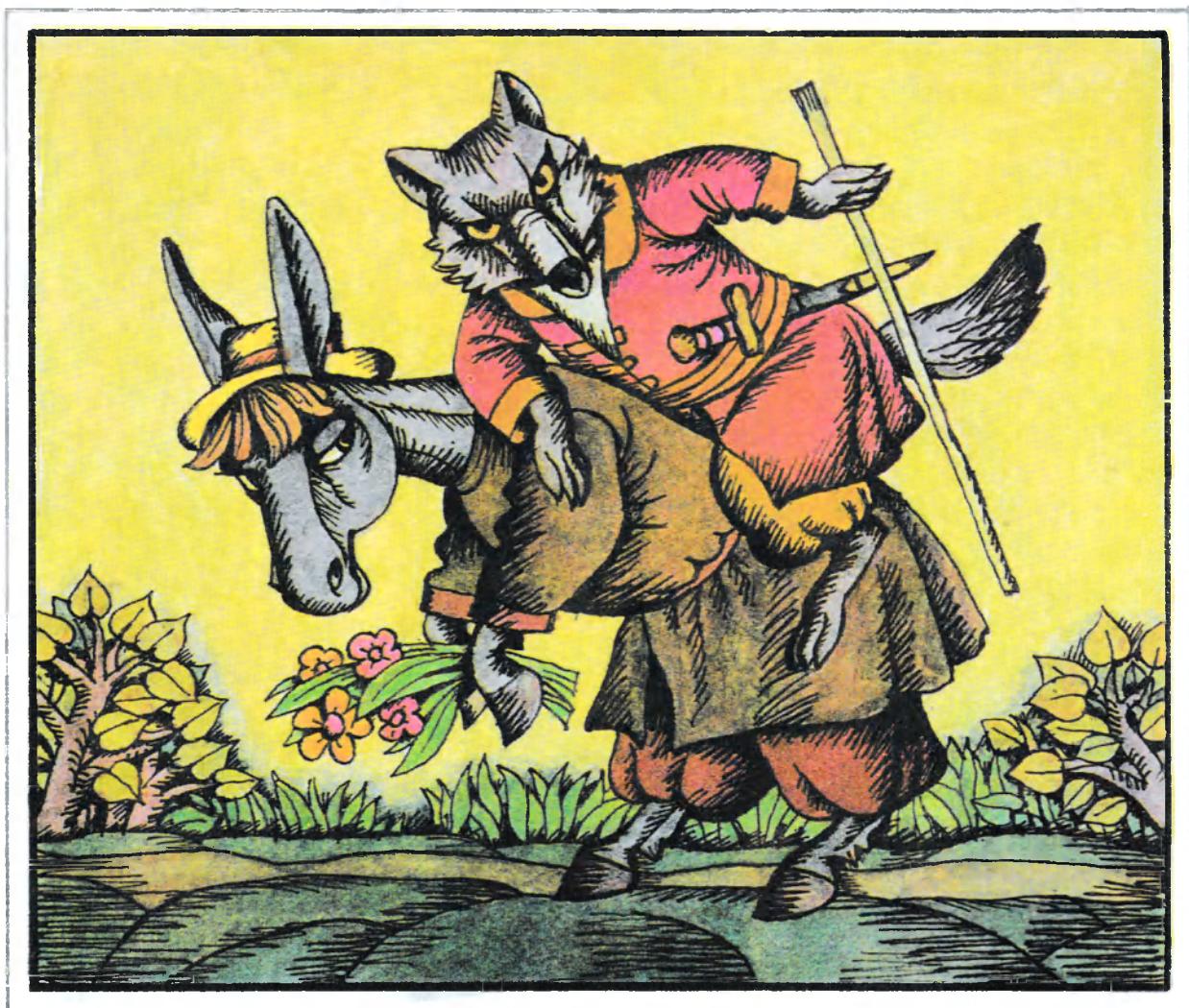
“Well, you see, the community sent me out after you and ordered me most urgently to go and not come back to the village without you.”

“And of what use would I be to the community?” asked the Wolf.

“You don’t know? Why the village is holding elections to choose a reeve!”

“Well, and what has this election to do with me?”

“The election is not the problem,” explained the Donkey. “The problem is that there is no one to choose from. All the men have quarrelled



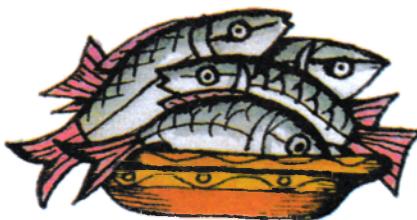
between themselves and now say: ‘Only the Wolf from the forest could possibly be the reeve now.’ After saying this they all agreed that I should go out to find you and bring you back to the village immediately. That’s how it is.”

On hearing this the Wolf raised his tail high with joy. He climbed up on the Donkey’s back right away and rode toward the village. When they came into the village the Donkey brayed loudly in a ringing voice, bringing people running out of their homes. On seeing the Wolf riding the Donkey’s back, they rushed at him with sticks, clubs and flails and beat him mercilessly. They beat him and beat him till the Wolf ran out of the village barely alive.

Rushing away, the wretched fellow kept looking back to see if the people were chasing him. It was only after the village was out of sight that the Wolf, seeing a stack of hay, jumped up on it, stretched, and lay down to rest. Resting, he began loudly to speak to himself:

“My father was never a reeve, my grandfather was not a reeve, so why did I suddenly and foolishly have the urge to be a reeve? Ekh, it’s too bad that there isn’t a hearty lad around who would give me a few clouts with a solid whip and teach me a lesson.”

But there was a hearty lad sitting beneath the stack with a pitchfork beside him. On hearing the Wolf, he jumped up and gave him at least ten blows across his back, with such strength that the Wolf gave up his ghost.



THE VIXEN AND THE CRAB

A Vixen once met a Crab. She stopped for a moment, watching his slow crawl, and then began to make fun of him.

“Well, you are a fast-moving one, I must say! A truly wretched creature! Now tell me, poor Crab, is it true that once on an Easter Friday you were sent for yeast it was a year later, on Easter Saturday, that you returned with the yeast, and after all that you ended up by spilling it all over the floor?”



“Perhaps it was the truth at one time,” answered the Crab, “but now it greatly resembles a lie.”

“My, my! That means, I suppose, that you are much faster now?”

“Faster or not, it is no reason for sarcasm on your part. If you want to know how fast I am, then let’s make a bet. I bet that I will reach that little stump over there before you will.”

“What? What?” cried the astonished Vixen. “You want to race on a bet with me?”

“Not only race, but I’ll let you start one jump ahead of me, and see if I don’t reach our goal ahead of you,” said the Crab.

Having made their bets, the Vixen placed herself a jump ahead of the Crab, who lost no time in seizing her tail with his claws. Off they went, the Vixen running with all her might, so fast that she raised a cloud of dust. She reached the stump, panting, and shouted:

“Where are you, Crab?”

There was no answer.

“Well, Crab, where are you?” she shouted again, and turned around with her tail to the stump.

The Crab immediately let go of her tail and answered:

“Here I am! I’ve been waiting here for some time. In fact I even ran past the stump and returned.”



THE WAR BETWEEN THE DOG AND THE WOLF

Once upon a time a husbandman owned a Dog who established very friendly relations with a Wolf. They met often under an old oak on the edge of the forest and gossiped about one thing or another. The Dog kept the Wolf informed of the news in the village, while the Wolf gave the Dog the latest news in the forest.

Once the Wolf said to the Dog:

“Listen, Hryvko. I heard that your master’s Sow has had piglets.”

“That’s so. She had twelve piglets. And they’re so beautiful, round and pink, that it’s a pleasure to look at them.”

“Yum, yum!” the Wolf licked his chops. “You’re making my mouth water. Twelve, you say? Hm, I must go and visit them this very evening.”

“No, no, my friend,” said the Dog, “don’t do this! Do you remember the agreement we made? We will be friends — I will tell you all the news in the village, and in return you don’t venture onto the property of my master. Once you do him harm, then our friendship is over.”

“Oh, well,” answered the Wolf, “why should we quarrel over such a trifle? Why there are all of twelve piglets! It won’t even be noticed if I eat one or two.”

“No, my friend,” warned the Dog, “don’t come to us! There’ll be trouble!”

“What kind of trouble? Don’t be afraid! I’ll crawl into the sty so quietly, do my business with such caution, that no one will hear a sound.”

“But I will hear.”

“You? But I expect that you will be quiet, that you won’t give away your friend.”

“It’s fine for you to talk!” said the Dog sadly. “Not give away a friend! But my master is an even greater friend: he gives me food, so how can I look on indifferently while you do him harm? And what will he say to me afterwards?”

“Well, you do what you like,” said the Wolf, “but I must visit your piglets and I advise you to keep quiet.”

Night fell. The Wolf kept his word, came out of the forest and made straight for the sty. The Dog saw him and thought:

“What shall I do? I’ll wait a bit. If the Wolf will really manage to be quiet, I’ll let him do what he wants. But at the slightest noise from the sty, I won’t keep quiet.”

And indeed, the Wolf barely squeezed through an opening into the sty when the Sow heard him and began to squeal. The piglets joined their mother in the outcry and the Dog, hearing this, began to bark and howl. The master and mistress woke up, jumped out of bed, rushed to the sty, and there was the Wolf. They threw themselves at him and before the poor fellow could find his way out through the opening, he got such a beating that he didn’t go anywhere for several days, but lay in the forest licking his wounds.

The Dog also didn’t go to the edge of the forest to talk to the Wolf. After some time, however, the Wolf himself came to him in the evening, stopped outside the gate, and said:

"Aha, Hryvko! So that's the kind of a friend you are? Wait, just you wait! I won't forget this!"

"But didn't I tell you not to visit my master?" answered Hryvko.

"And didn't I tell you to keep quiet?" snapped the Wolf.

"But you told me that you wouldn't make any noise in the pigsty, remember? While it was quiet I remained silent. Why did you have to start an argument with the Sow?"

"Who on earth began an argument with her?" grumbled the Wolf angrily. "I had barely come into the sty when she began to squeal. But don't think I'm going to let her get away with this, come what may. Listen Hryvko, don't do anything foolish! Give me your word that you'll be silent, and I'll come and visit the Sow tonight."

"You can come, for all I care," said Hryvko, "just remember that it must be quiet in the sty. If you make the slightest noise, I can't remain silent."

With that the Wolf left, and after midnight again made his way toward the sty. But Hryvko was no fool and he told the Sow in a whisper that she should stay awake and be on guard, because the Wolf had promised to make a call on her. The Wolf had barely time to stick his head through the cranny, when the Sow and her piglets began such a racket in the sty, and Hryvko began to howl so mournfully beneath the house windows, that the Wolf scurried off to the forest as fast as he could.

Again a few days went by. Hryvko did not show up under the oak at the edge of the forest to talk with the Wolf, and the Wolf did not return to pay any more visits to the Sow. But one evening Hryvko saw the Wolf again — standing behind the gate and beckoning to him. He went up closer.

"Now what, Hryvko?" said the Wolf, acting friendly. "Why don't you come to the edge of the forest any more? Forgotten your old friend, eh? You have no desire for a little talk?"

"No, I've no desire," answered Hryvko.

"Hah, you Judas! You traitor!" shouted the Wolf. "You think I'll forget about this? You think I don't know that you warned the Sow? Just wait, you'll come out beyond this gate one day, and don't say I didn't warn you! You may be sure that that will be your last!"

"Well, what can I do?" said Hryvko. "You are born but once and you must die but once. I knew that our friendship wouldn't last long. But you remember too, Wolf, that I can keep an eye on you as well and bring you plenty of trouble."



"Why, you wretched son of a dog!" raged the Wolf behind the gate. "You even dare to threaten me? Well you can prepare for a state of war with me right now! We'll see who'll win. Three days from today I challenge you to appear with your knights by the oak in the clearing. You understand? And if you don't come, then misery will be yours! I'll come here with my knights, drag you out of your doghouse by the ears and tear you to pieces."

With that the Wolf departed. Returning to the forest, he went straight to the Bear's den and standing before him, he bowed low respectfully, and said:

"I have come to you, Uncle Burmilo, to ask a big favour. I have quarreled with the Dog, Hryvko, and I have declared war on him. Would you be so kind as to help me out by becoming part of my army?"

"Of course, I will!" answered the Bear. "That upstart has to be taught a lesson, once and for all."

Overjoyed, the Wolf ran on till he met the wild Boar.

"Listen, Uncle Porilich," said the Wolf, "do help me! In three days I will be at war with the Dog and I'm gathering together the best of the forest's knights to assist me."

"Good, good," said the Boar. "You can count on me."

For his third knight, the Wolf approached the Fox, Mikita. They decided together that they had adequate forces, and when the day agreed upon for battle arrived, they met under the oak tree and awaited the enemy.

In the meantime, the Dog, Hryvko, was very worried after the Wolf declared war on him.

"What on earth can I do?" he thought to himself. "What knights can I recruit to stand by me in this war? No, I guess this is going to be the end of me."

So poor Hryvko worried a day, a second day, and could come to no solution for his predicament. He lost his appetite and walked about with lowered head, not himself at all.

"Hey, Hryvko, what's the matter with you?" called out the Cat, Murko, his good friend and comrade.

"Ah, it's easy for you to talk," said Hryvko, forlornly. "It's my misfortune and that's that, and there's nothing that you can do to help me."

"Well, tell me, tell me," insisted Murko. "Whether I help you or not, I can at least cheer you up."

Hryvko then told Murko all about his adventures with the Wolf.



"Don't worry, brother," said Murko. "I'll help you. Now go and talk to the Gander and the Drake, for I'm sure that we won't come to shame in this war."

Hryvko listened to this good advice from his friend and invited the Drake and the Gander, both of whom promised to help him fight the war.

The agreed upon day of battle arrived. It had not yet dawned when Hryvko marched out to the field of war with his army. The Gander walked in front, honking in step, exactly as if he was beating a drum: Tra-ta-ta! Tra-ta-ta! After him, shoulder to shoulder, marched Hryvko and Murko, with their tails lifted straight up, like soldiers carrying rifles, and bringing up in the rear waddled the Drake, bobbing his head up and down, picking at the grass and quacking "That's right! That's right!" as he went.

In the meantime, the Wolf, awaiting the enemy, had asked the Bear to climb the tree and be on the lookout for the approaching army and let them know below how strong it was. The Fox, Mikita, stood in front with his bushy tail raised like a banner. The Wolf stationed himself beneath the tree, and the Boar was commanded to burrow into a pile of leaves and sit there in ambush till such time as he would be called to create a panic in the enemy ranks.

Finally, the enemy force appeared.

"Listen, brothers!" the Bear spoke up from his perch in the tree. "They're coming! The enemy is coming! And how terrifying they are! They have a drummer marching in front — can you hear the drum?"

"Yes, we can..." said the knights, trembling.

"And after him come two ferocious gunmen with rifles!"

"Oh, disaster!" yelped the Wolf and the Fox in one voice. "This is the end!"

"And behind them marches some sort of magician, giving the riflemen some sort of moral support probably. He's picking up their ammunition for them and keeps bowing his head and saying 'That's right! That's right!'"

"Oh, it must be my soul he's after!" groaned the Boar from under the leaves.

"What shall we do, brothers?" asked the Wolf. "It wouldn't be seemly for us to retreat from the field of battle without even trying. Come, let's face them boldly!"

But he had barely finished saying this when the Cat, noting from afar that something was moving and rustling in the leaves, and



thinking it a mouse, pounced at it with all his might. But it was the Boar's tail, for while he himself lay quietly under the leaves, in his fear at what was coming he unknowingly twitched his tail. With his sharp claws sunk into the Boar's tail, the Cat began to chew at it with his teeth. Maddened with fear and pain, the Boar squealed horribly and took flight. Then the Cat, even more frightened, arched his back, hissed, and dashed up the tree.

"Heavens!" growled the Bear, who was watching the action from above. "This must be death coming up at me!"

And he climbed higher and higher into the tree, trying to escape the ferocious enemy, till he scrambled out on a slender branch that couldn't hold his weight and broke, sending the poor Bear hurtling heavily to the ground. But even here there was no rest. The Dog, seeing the Fox, rushed at him and grabbed him not by the head, but by the tail. The poor Fox jerked with all his might and leaving his tail between Hryvko's teeth, dashed away as fast as his legs could carry him. At that moment the Bear fell from the tree and though barely alive from pain and fear, leapt to his feet and fled into the forest. Of course, after such a complete rout of his army there was nothing left for the Wolf to do but take to his heels.

That's how the Dog and his friends won a brilliant victory over the Wolf. After proclaiming it suitably and standing in the field of battle for a while, they went joyfully home. The defeated knights, meanwhile, met deep in the forest near the Bear's den, to recall and relive the frightening experiences of the war.

"It was no great feat for them to defeat us, since they had two rifles," said the Wolf.

"Look, brothers, just look at the chunk of my tail that they lopped off with a sword!" said the Boar.

"And I can think of nothing else but that they threw a bomb, for only that could have taken off my tail so neatly," said the Fox.

"And I don't even remember what happened to me," groaned the Bear.

"I can just recall that this was the first and last time in my life that I tried to fly! Well, what's done is done! The flying itself wasn't so bad, it was the landing that was horrible."



GODMOTHER VIXEN

One day, long ago, Brother Wolf and Sister Vixen decided to work honestly for their daily bread. They found themselves a piece of land and agreed to plant potatoes together. Having agreed, they started out early one morning to dig up the plot and plant the potatoes. They had breakfasted at home on what God gave them, and so they wouldn't have to return home for lunch, took a pot of honey and a basket of buns to the field with them. Putting the food among some bushes near the field, they crossed themselves and set to work.

They dug and dug, but the Vixen was soon tired of honest work. Though continuing to dig, her mind was busily thinking of how she could get away to the bushes and have a lick of honey. While she thought, a Bittern in a nearby swamp suddenly boomed out loudly:

"Hup-hup-hup!"

"Right away, right away, kinsman!" shouted the Vixen, as if in answer to a call, and throwing down her spade she prepared to go.

"Where are you off to, Sister Vixen?" asked Brother Wolf.

"Didn't you hear the Bittern calling me?"

"Whatever for?"

"We were talking only yesterday. You see there is a christening in his family today and I've been asked to be Godmother."

"Ah, if that's so, then go, but don't be long."

"I'll be back very soon," said the Vixen. "You go on digging your piece, I'll catch up."

So saying she ran into the bushes, had a good feed of the honey, ate a bun, then tied everything up again very neatly, licked her chops and returned to the Wolf proudly swinging her tail — a Godmother, of course.

“What, is the christening over already?” asked the Wolf.

“Yes,” answered the Vixen.

“And what has God given them?”

“A boy.”

“And what did they name him?”

“Beginning.”

“What a name! I’ve never heard one like it,” marvelled the Wolf. The Vixen said no more, but went to work.

Perhaps an hour, or maybe two passed, when the Vixen again craved a taste of the honey. And barely had the Bittern in the swamp hooted again, than she shouted out loudly:

“Right away, kinsman, right away!”

“What was that, Sister Vixen?” asked the Wolf.

“You see, there’s been another birth in my kinsman’s home and he’s again asking me to the christening.”

“Well, if you’ve been asked, then go, but don’t be long.”

“I’ll be back in a flash, Brother Wolf!” answered the Vixen, and dashed into the bushes, straight to the pot of honey. She ate her fill, had a bun. There was little left of their lunch, when she returned to the Wolf.

“You’re back already! Is the christening over?”

“Yes.”

“And what did God give this time?”

“A girl.”

“And what are they naming her?”

“Middle.”

“Well! I’ve never heard of a name like that,” marvelled the Wolf.

“Among bitterns, Brother Wolf, such unusual names are common. That’s why they are such noisy birds.”

They worked another hour and again the smell of the honey tantalized the Vixen so that barely had the Bittern hooted from the swamp again than she shouted:

“I’m coming kinsman, I’m coming!”

“Where now, Sister Vixen?” asked the Wolf.

“Can’t you hear the Bittern calling me to another christening?”

“I’ve never heard of anything like it — asking you to act as Godmother so often!” wondered the Wolf.

"It's because he's so fond of me, Brother Wolf."

"Then run along, but don't linger. This work has to be finished today."

"I'll be back in a flash, Brother. You go ahead, don't worry. I'll do my bit."

So saying she rushed into the bushes, licked the pot clean of honey, finished off the buns, and leaving a mess behind her returned to the Wolf.

"Well, is the christening over?"

"That's so."

"And what did the Lord give them?"

"A boy."

"And what did they name him?"

"Finish."

"Well, may he grow strong and healthy."

They dug on and in no time at all it was time for lunch. The Wolf had long ago become hungry but was somehow too embarrassed to say so, but throwing down his spade at last, he said:

"Enough for now. Isn't it time for lunch?"

"Of course it's time, Brother Wolf," answered the Vixen, digging away, as if truly interested only in the work.

"Aren't you hungry?"

"Well, no, Brother Wolf. You go ahead and eat, I was given food at the christening."

The Wolf went into the bushes where they had left their food. Seeing the remains of their lunch, the empty pot licked clean, the upturned basket without a crumb, he realized what Sister Vixen had been up to and where she had gone when she pretended to attend the christenings. Now he understood why she had given her Godchildren those odd names.

"So that's what you're like, you wicked Vixen!" he shouted. "You want with work and hunger to see the end of me, while you eat all the food yourself! Just wait! I'll tear you apart for this myself and have you for my lunch!"

The Vixen, hearing his shouts and seeing him running toward her, angry and spiteful, didn't wait around. She took to her heels and ran into the forest where she streaked into the first burrow that presented itself. It happened to be under the roots of an ancient oak. She thought that she had hidden herself very well, but the Wolf was close enough to have seen the end of her bushy tail as she drew it into the burrow. He ran up and shouted:



“Ha, so here you are! Come out of there immediately! You can’t hide from me!”

But the Vixen was not stupid. She sat in the burrow, barely breathing.

“You won’t answer? Good! Just wait, I’ll reach you!”

The Wolf picked up a long, hooked branch of a tree that had fallen to the ground, stuck it into the burrow and poked it about. His idea was to hook the Vixen by the leg and drag her out into the world. Before she realized what was happening, the hook had indeed caught her leg. The burrow was tight and the Wolf, feeling that he had caught something, began to pull with all his strength. The Vixen, though shivering with fear, began to laugh loudly, crying out:

“What a fool! You’ve caught a root of the oak and think you’ve got my leg. Go ahead, pull, you fool, pull!”

Hearing this, the Wolf let go of the Vixen’s leg and began to again poke the branch around in the burrow till he really hooked a root of the tree.

“Oh, wow, wow! My foot!” screamed the Vixen. The stupid Wolf, delighted, began to heave till he was exhausted and broke the branch. He then spat on the ground, disgusted, and took himself off, swearing that never again would he enter into any agreements with the Vixen.



THE RABBIT AND THE BEAR

Once upon a time a Bear lived in the forest and he was so strong and fierce that God forbid! He would go about the forest strangling and tearing everything he met; one thing he would eat, and ten he would leave behind, taking life in vain. The forest was large, with many animals, but all lived in fear. For it was quite certain that within a year there wouldn’t be a living soul left in the forest if Burmilo would continue to keep house in this way. After several meetings the animals decided on a plan. They sent a delegation to the Bear, which was empowered to say the following:

“Honourable Lord of the forest, Sir Bear! Why are you so abusive?

You eat one and kill ten more out of anger and leave them. Within a year, if you keep this up, there won't be a living soul left in the forest. Better if you would do as we suggest — sit quietly in your burrow and every day we will send someone from among ourselves for you to eat."

The Bear listened to this suggestion, then said:

"Good! But remember this, if you should fail to provide for me even one day, I'll tear you all apart!"

From that day on, the animals, day after day, sent the Bear someone from among themselves for his meal. Someone who was already old and helpless, or a poor widow who had no desire to keep on living in this world, or someone simple who couldn't cope with everyday living, these were the first to be sent to the Bear, who never questioned, but tearing the animal apart would calmly make a meal of it.

Finally there were no more aged, simple or orphaned victims — it became necessary to choose from among those who had no wish to become the Bear's dinner. They began to draw lots and the one who lost had to go to the Bear and give himself up to be eaten.

One day this lot fell to the Rabbit. The poor Rabbit was overcome with fright, but what could he do? Others had gone before him, so he had to go too. He didn't protest, he only begged an hour's grace to say farewell to his wife and children. But by the time he found his wife, by the time he got his entire family together, by the time the farewells were said, the tears shed and the embraces ended, the sun had long gone past the dinner hour. At last the Rabbit tore himself away to begin his last journey. He started out, poor fellow, toward the Bear's burrow. But don't think that he went hippity-hopping as rabbits do, that he ran to beat the wind! Oh no! It was no time for the Rabbit to be hopping. He barely put one foot before the other, pausing every now and then to wipe the flood of tears from his face, to heave a deep sigh, so deep that it echoed through the forest. As he was thus proceeding, he suddenly came upon a stone well in the middle of the forest. It was curbed around with logs and down below its waters were very deep. The Rabbit stopped at the mouth of the well and looked down, his tears going drop-drop into the water. But seeing his image reflected in the water, he began to look at it closely, then suddenly cheered up and jumped for joy. His head was suddenly filled with a brilliant thought — how he could save himself from death and deliver all the animals from this fierce and unreasonable Bear. Crying and sighing no longer, but running with all his might and main, the Rabbit sped toward the Bear's burrow.

It was close to nightfall. The Bear had sat all day waiting for the time when the animals would send him someone for his dinner. He waited and waited and nothing happened. Hunger began to torment him, and along with this his heart began to beat with anger.

"What does this mean!" he roared. "What can they be thinking of? Have they forgotten about me or do they think that one crow is supposed to last me two days? Oh, those confounded animals! If I don't get something to eat in the next minute I swear by the elm and the beech that tomorrow, as soon as it dawns, I'll go into the forest and strangle every living thing in it, not a single tail will be left!"

But minute passed minute, hour passed hour, and food didn't come. By evening the Bear didn't know what to do with himself from hunger and anger. It was in this state of mind that the Rabbit found him when he arrived.

"Ha, you delusion, you wretch, you pesky goose!" shouted the Bear. "What do you mean by coming so late! And I had to wait, you mosquito, in hunger all day for you?"

The Rabbit trembled on hearing the Bear's roar and his angry words, but came to himself in a moment and getting up on his hind legs before the Bear, he spoke as respectfully as he could:

"Honourable Lord! It was not my fault that I have come so late. And you can't blame the animals. Today, on your birthday, they got together at dawn and chose four of us for you, and we all set out immediately, like the wind, so that you, Your Honour, would have a ball today."

"Well then? Why are you so late and where are the other three?" asked the Bear.

"We had a very bad experience," answered the Rabbit. "Thinking that there could be no other Lord in the forest but yourself, we came quietly along the path, when suddenly a huge Bear jumped out of a fortified tower.

'Stop!' he roared.

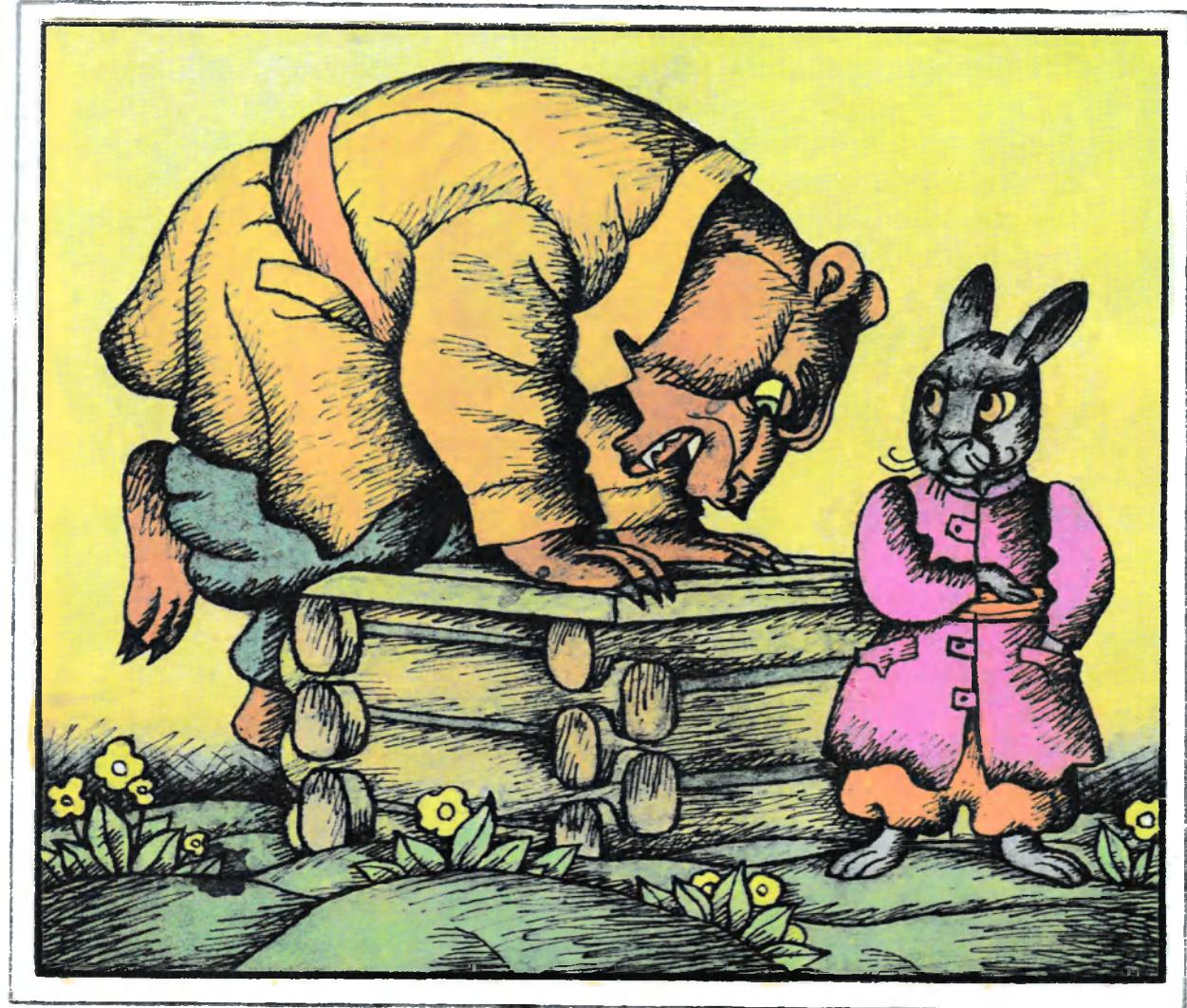
"We stopped.

'Where are you going?'

"We told him in truth.

'Ho, ho!' he shouted. 'Nothing will come of this! This is my forest and I won't allow that your meat should feed some intruder who has no right to be here. You're mine and I'm going to have you for my own dinner.'

"We began to plead, beg, explain to him that today was your



birthday and that it wouldn't be very nice if you were left without your dinner on such an important day — but no, he wouldn't even listen.

'I'm the master here!' he roared, 'and I alone have the right to interfere!'

"And he took all four of us to his castle. I was barely able to convince him that he should at least let me go to you, so that I could tell you what happened. Now, Honourable Lord, just think for yourself, are we really to blame that you have been fainting with hunger today? What do you intend to do next?"

On hearing this story the Bear bristled all over. All his anger was now turned toward the rival who had so unexpectedly appeared on the scene.

"Who is this good-for-nothing who dares to intrude here?" he roared, raking up the earth around him with his claws. "Rabbit! Lead me to him immediately. I'll tear him into little pieces!"

"Honourable Lord" said the Rabbit. "This is a very mighty Lord, quite terrible, really..."

"What? You think that I'm afraid of him? Take me to him immediately and we'll see who's the stronger."

"But Your Honour, he lives in a stone castle..."

"Ha, what is a castle to me! Lead me to him. I'll get him even if he hides on the top of the tallest fir!"

The Rabbit led the Bear to the well and said:

"Honourable Sir! Your strength is great. Look, your enemy had only to see you coming when he immediately ran and hid in his castle."

"Where is he? Where is he?" shouted the Bear, looking around and seeing no one.

"Come here and look down here!" said the Rabbit and led the Bear to the well. The Bear stood over its mouth, looked down and sure enough, there was the Bear.

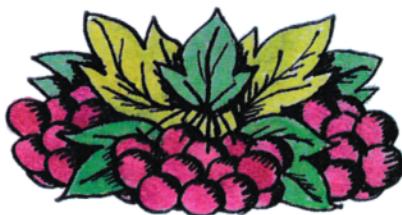
"Can you see your enemy?" asked the Rabbit. "How he's looking up out of his hideaway?"

"Well, it won't be me if I don't get him out of there!" said the Bear and suddenly roared out of his Bear's throat down into the well. His voice roared and echoed back at him from out of the well twice as loud, as if out of a huge tunnel.

"So that's how it is!" shouted the Bear. "You threaten me? Just wait, I'll show you!"

With these words the Bear jumped down into the well with a great splash and there drowned. The Rabbit stood beside the well and

watched until this enemy of the forest animals was completely drowned, then he sped like the wind to his friends and told them how he had fooled the Bear and released them from their misfortune. There is no need to tell you what joy reigned in the forest and how the animals thanked the Rabbit for his great deed.



THE KINGBIRD AND THE BEAR

The Bear and the Wolf were walking through the forest one day when they heard a bird twittering in the shrubbery. Coming closer, they saw a tiny bird with an upright tail hopping from branch to branch and chirping.

"Brother Wolf, what bird is that, that sings so beautifully?" asked the Bear.

"Quiet, Bear, this is the Kingbird," whispered the Wolf.

"A Kingbird?" the startled Bear whispered back. "Then in that case shouldn't we bow to him?"

"Of course," said the Wolf, and they both bowed to the bird, right down to the ground. But the bird didn't even look at them. He went on hopping from branch to branch, chirping away and continuously flirting his upright tail.

"You see, he's so small, yet so proud that he won't even glance at us!" grumbled the Bear. "It would be interesting to see what it's like in his palace."

"I don't know what it's like," said the Wolf. "Though I know where the palace is, I've never had the nerve to look in."

"Frightening, eh?"

"Frightening or not, there just never seemed to be a right moment."

"Then let's go now, I'll take a look!" said the Bear.

They came to the hollow tree where the bird had his nest, and just as the Bear bent forward to look into it, the Wolf grabbed him by his coat-tail and tugged.

"Wait, Bear, stop!" he whispered.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"See, the Kingbird has flown up! And there's his Queen. It's too awkward for us to look while they're here!"

The Bear followed the Wolf into the bushes while the Kingbird and his wife flew into the hollow to feed their young. After they flew away, the Bear came up and looked in. The hollow was like any hollow in a decaying tree; a few feathers were spread about and on them sat five baby Kingbirds.

"You mean to say that this is the Kingbird's palace?" shouted the Bear. "Why, this is nothing but a hole! And there are supposed to be the Kingbird's children? Fie! What ugly little strays!"

And spitting vigorously, the Bear turned to go away, when here the baby Kingbirds in the nest began to squeal:

"Ho, ho, Mr. Bear! So you spit on us? You'll have to answer painfully for this insult."

The Bear felt a cold shiver run through him at their squealing. He ran from the ugly hollow as fast as he could, took shelter in his burrow, sat down and sat there. The baby Kingbirds in their nest, once started, kept on squealing non-stop, till their mother and father returned.

"What's going on here? What's happened?" asked their parents, and offered their children a fly, a worm, whatever each had picked up.

"We don't want any flies! We don't want any worms!"

"Then what has happened to you?" asked the parents.

"The Bear was here and called us ugly strays, and he even spit into our nest," explained the little Kingbirds.

"You don't say!" shouted father Kingbird, and without thinking long, he rose and flew to the Bear's burrow.

"You old Burmilo!" he said, sitting on a branch over the Bear's head. "What were you thinking of? What was your reason for calling my children strays and added to that, spitting into my nest? You'll answer to me for this! Tomorrow morning you'll meet me in bloody battle!"

What could the Bear do? If it was war, then it was war. He went out to call all the animals for support: the Wolf, the wild Boar, the Fox, the Badger, the Deer, the Rabbit — all who ran about the forest on four legs. The Kingbird also called on all his feathered friends, not to



speak of the small life of the forest: Flies, Bees, Hornets, Mosquitos — and told them to prepare for a great war on the morrow.

“Listen,” said the Kingbird, “we must send someone out to scout the enemy camp, so that we’ll know who their general will be and what they will choose for their war cry.”

The counsel decided to send the Mosquito because he was the smallest and the most cunning. The Mosquito flew to the Bear’s camp and arrived just as deliberations were in progress.

“How shall we start?” asked the Bear. “You, Fox, are the most clever among us, so you will be our general.”

“Very well,” said the Fox. “You see, if it were animals that we had to deal with, it would be better to have the Bear himself for general, but we have to deal with all the winged creatures, so in this case I may be more helpful. The most important thing here is quick eye and a cunning brain. Now listen — here is my plan. The enemy will be flying through the air. But we won’t bother with them. We’ll go straight to the Kingbird’s nest and kidnap his children. Once we have them in our hands, we’ll force the old Kingbird to end the war and surrender, then victory will be ours.”

“Good, very good!” shouted all the animals.

“This means,” continued the Fox, “that we must advance in a solid line, remain together, because there are Eagles and Hawks and other birds in the enemy ranks; if we advance in a scattered fashion they will peck our eyes out. Together we will be safer.”

“True, true,” cried the Rabbit to whom the very mention of the Eagle made his knees shake.

“I’ll go ahead and the rest of you follow,” said the Fox. “You see my tail — it will be our battle standard. Everyone watch my tail closely. When I’m holding it straight up in the air, it means you can advance boldly. If I see an ambush ahead, I’ll immediately lower it to half mast; that will be a signal for us to advance more slowly and carefully. And if there is real danger ahead I’ll bring my tail right down between my legs. Then you must run with all your might.”

“Great, great!” shouted all the animals and praised the Fox highly for his cleverness. The Mosquito, having heard the whole clever plan, flew back to the Kingbird and told him about it in detail.

The next day at dawn, the animals gathered together to begin their march. The earth trembled, the brush crackled, the roars, the squeals that resounded through the forest were frightening. On the other side, the birds were getting together: the air was full of the noise of flapping wings, leaves fluttering down from the trees, shrieks, clam-

our, cawing. The animals came forward in a solid line straight toward the Kingbird's nest; like a thick cloud, the birds flew above, but couldn't stop them. But the old Kingbird wasn't too worried. Seeing the Fox marching proudly at the head of his army, his tail, like a candle, in the air, he called to the Hornet and said:

"Listen, friend! You see that Fox over there? He's the enemy general. Fly as fast as you can, sit on his stomach, and bite with all your might."

The Hornet flew straight to the Fox's stomach. The Fox felt that something was crawling over his stomach and he could have chased away whatever it was with a wave of his tail, but no, his tail at this moment was the battle standard, so he couldn't. But here the Hornet sank his stinger into a very tender spot!

"Oh woe!" howled the Fox and lowered his tail halfway.

"What is it? What's happening?" the animals called to each other.

"I think... some sort... of ambush," muttered the Fox, clenching his teeth with pain.

"An ambush, an ambush!" the message was passed down the line. "Carefully, there's an ambush."

But here the Hornet again stung the Fox with all his might. The Fox howled with pain, leaped into the air, put his tail between his legs and ran. Now the animals asked no questions about what was happening, but fled in terror in whatever direction was handy, falling all over each other in their haste. And the Birds, the Bees, the Mosquitos and the Hornets took after them, beating them from above — pecking, biting, tearing. It was a terrible battle! The animals — those who remained alive — scattered and hid in hollows and holes, while the Kingbird with his birds and insects were victorious.

The Kingbird flew joyfully back to his nest to tell his children.

"Well, children, now you can eat, we've won the battle with the animals."

"No," said the baby Kingbirds, "we won't eat till the Bear comes here and begs our pardon."

What to do? The Kingbird flew to the Bear's burrow, sat on a branch over his head and said:

"Well, Burmilo, so you would fight with the Kingbird, eh?" But the Bear, who had marched in the rear of his army and had been severely battered by the hooves and horns of the wild Boar and the Deer when they fled in retreat, was now lying down and groaning. "Go away and give me peace," he growled. "I'll tell everyone not to provoke you in the future."

"No, my friend, that is not enough," said the Kingbird. "You must go to my hollow tree and beg pardon of my children, because otherwise you'll be in even greater trouble."

And the Bear had to go and apologize to the baby Kingbirds. Only then were the Kingbird children satisfied and began again to eat and drink.



TWE WOLF, THE VIXEN, AND THE DONKEY

Brother Wolf and Sister Vixen had lived all their lives by cunning and craft, sinned and kept sinning, till they finally decided to stop, and said:

"Enough of our sinning. It's time we repented. Let's go beyond the ocean on a pilgrimage and find absolution for our sins."

Having made up their minds they prepared for the journey and off they went. They went on and on till they came upon a Donkey grazing in a meadow.

"A good day to you, Brother!" they addressed him.

"Good health to you, God's people!" answered the Donkey.

They stood there looking at the Donkey with mouth-watering desire, till finally the Vixen said:

"Maybe, Brother Donkey, you would care to join us in our journey?"

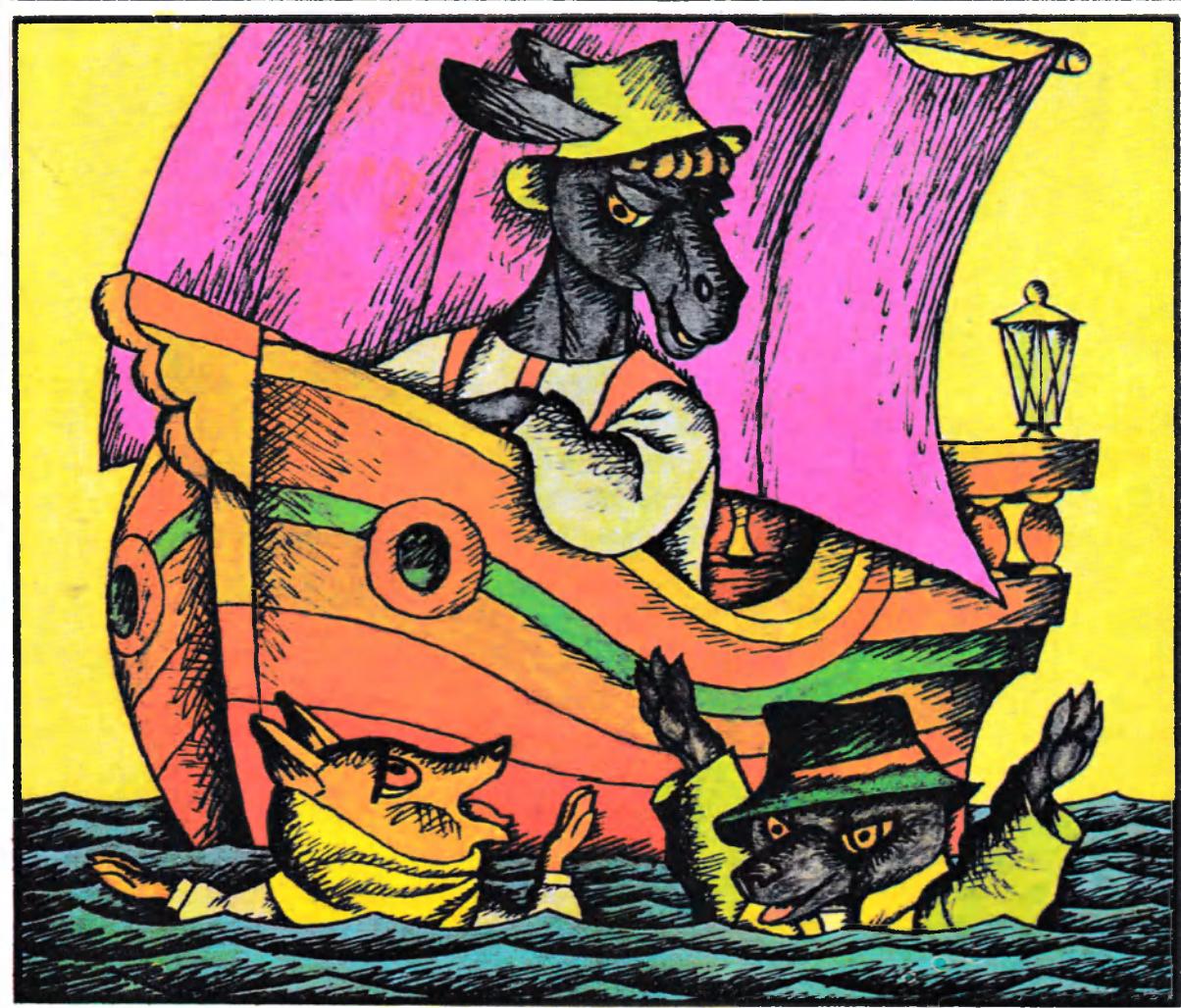
"And where in God's world may you be going?"

"For absolution to a far-off land beyond the ocean."

"Why not, I'll go along with you."

"Come, Son, come," said the Wolf, respectfully. "You will be safe with us and we'll have some pleasant conversations as we journey."

Whether they travelled far or near, it is enough to know that they arrived by the sea in the best of harmony. Here the Vixen immediately flitted hither and thither, found a boat along the shore and called out to her companions. They sat themselves in the boat, untied it, and set off to sea. The Donkey manned the oars, the Wolf the wheel,





and the Vixen looked after the sails. Everything was going so well that they were in good spirits.

They sailed and they sailed until the Vixen and the Wolf became very hungry indeed. The Donkey didn't suffer because the floor of the boat was covered with leaves and straw and these he munched at contentedly while plying the oars so that the spray flew in all directions.

"Listen," said the Vixen finally, "here we are, with God's help, in the middle of the sea, but who knows if we will be able to make it to the opposite shore?"

"God is merciful," answered the Donkey and ploughed ahead.

"That is so, and I agree," answered the Vixen nodding her head.
"But what if we have in any way angered his mercy."

"In what way?" cried the Wolf and the Donkey in one voice.

"We forgot to make our confessions before we set out to sea. Don't you know the customs of Christian folk?"

"Ai, yai, yai!" cried the Wolf. "Yours is the truth, Vixen. A terrible sin! What if a storm should come up and drown us, what then? Not only in body, but in soul will we perish, and for what eternity."

"What, then, should we do?" asked the donkey, disturbed.

"You know what," suggested the Vixen, "let's confess to one another out loud and so do penance each for our own sins and perhaps we will be forgiven. You, Brother Wolf, confess to me, I'll confess to you and the Donkey will confess to us both."

"Good!" agreed the Wolf. "My sins weigh upon me, Sister Vixen. When, in the past, I raided a sheepfold, I wasn't content to kill one sheep or even two, for something to eat, but would kill ten or twenty just out of cruelty."

"For such a sin, Brother Wolf, you will fast and pray for three days. But my sins are no lighter. When it so happened that I invaded

a hen-house, I didn't choke one hen or two, just enough for food for myself and my children, but would destroy ten or twenty chickens out of sheer spite."

"Ah, for such a sin, Sister Vixen, you must pray and fast for four days. Now you, good Brother Donkey, how have you offended our Lord?"

"I recall," said the Donkey from a contrite heart, "that one day when the Master harnessed me to the wagon and drove me all day with loads of watermelons, pumpkins, carrots, cucumbers and other vegetables from the garden, a cucumber fell off the wagon and I bent my head and ate it. I really can't think of anything else"

"Ha, you ignorant sinner!" cried the Wolf and the Vixen in one voice. "Why, that is the worst of sins! Whoever gave you the right to eat cucumbers? You've broken one of the most important commandments, and for this there is no penance except death."

The Donkey suddenly realized where this was leading and said:

"Well, if it must be death, then it must be death. At least I'll do penance for my sin with death. I'm only sorry for one thing. Before I set out on this journey I buried a great treasure under a stone in the field. It would be a shame for it to be wasted there. Would you, good people, dig it up and give the contents to the Holy Church and for a Mass asking for mercy on my soul?"

"Good, Brother Donkey, good," said the Wolf. "We'll do every thing you say, only tell us where the treasure lies and how we should go about finding it?"

"It lies a short distance from the spot where you found me and you'll recognize it by the stone that lies over the hole. The stone has the self-same mark on it that I have here on my left hoof. Take a good look at it so that you will recognize it on the stone."

So saying the Donkey lifted his left hind leg and the Wolf bent forward to take a look at what kind of a mark there was on the Donkey's hoof. But at that moment the Donkey suddenly swung his leg back, giving the Wolf such a blow across the snout that he was flung over the side of the boat into the sea. Before he knew what had happened to him, he sank without a trace.

The Vixen, seeing what happened to the Wolf, jumped up in fright, but so unfortunately that she too, fell into the sea and disappeared. Then the Donkey rowed and rowed along happily, till he reached the shore.



THE PAINTED FOX

There lived in a certain forest a Fox called Mikita who was very sly and cunning. However often the hunters might chase him, send the dogs after him, set traps for him or leave poisoned meat around for him to eat, they were never able to catch him. Fox Mikita made fools of them, evading all hazards and even warning his friends. But when he himself went out hunting, whether to the chicken coop or the granary, there was no bolder, more resourceful or more skillful thief than he. It reached the point where he, more than once, went hunting in broad daylight, and he never returned empty-handed.

This extraordinary luck, and his cleverness, made him very arrogant. He felt that nothing was impossible for him.

"What do you think of this?" he boasted to his friends. "So far I have gone only to the villages, but tomorrow I shall go to the town in full daylight, and steal a chicken right from the market."

"Oh, go away! Don't talk nonsense!" his friends replied.

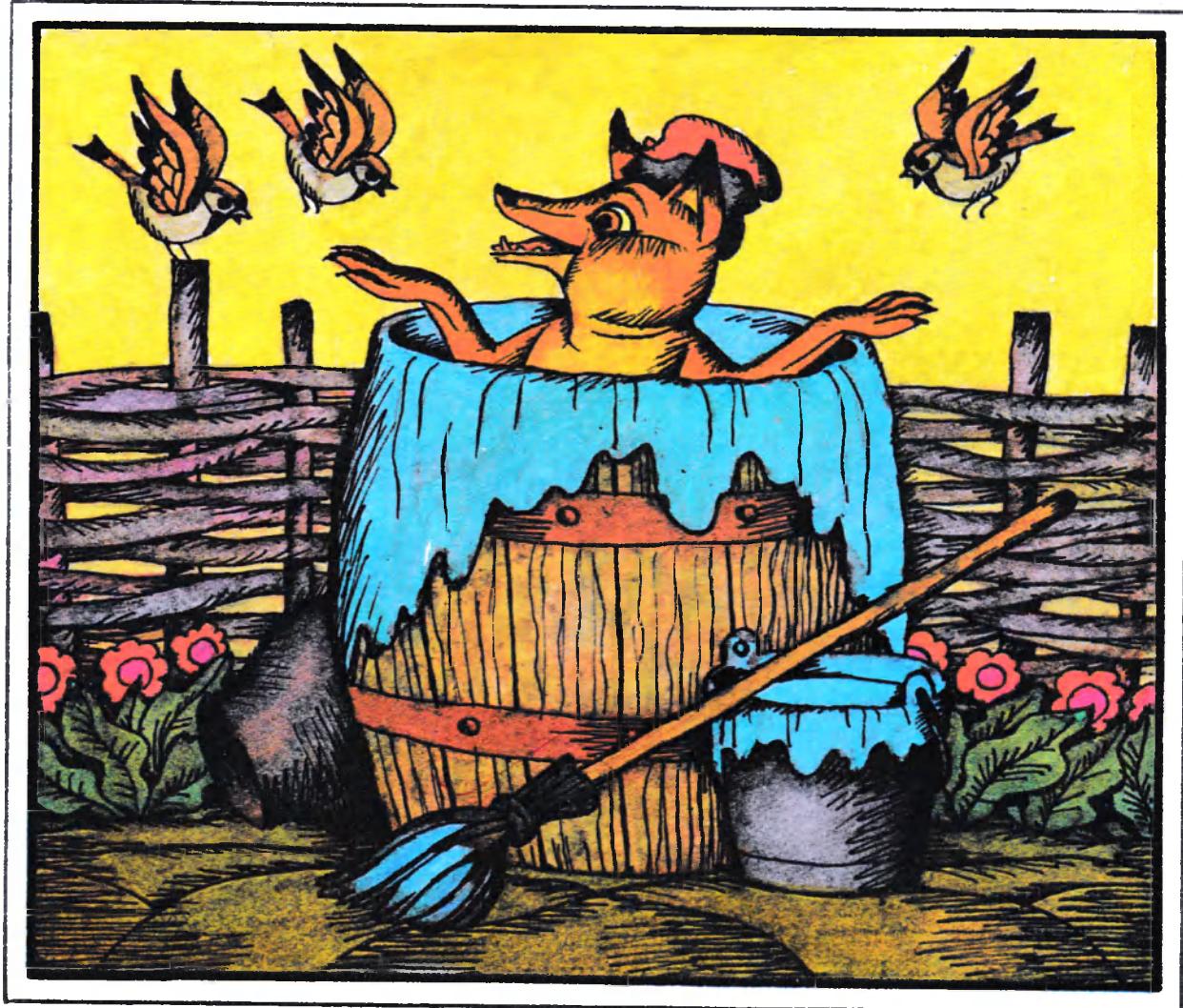
"What nonsense? Well, you'll see!" our Fox replied raucously.

"Maybe we'll see, and maybe we won't. Dogs walk the streets in packs there. Perhaps you can change into a flea, so that they can't see you and tear you apart."

"Well, you'll see. I won't turn into a flea, and they still won't tear me apart!" the Fox persisted, and made a firm decision to go to the town the very next day, marketing day, and take a chicken from the market.

But this time, poor Mikita overestimated himself.

Through the hemp and the corn he went, safely reaching the outskirts of the town; through the gardens he dashed, jumping over the low hedges and hiding among the vegetables until he reached the very centre of the town. But here was trouble! For at least a brief moment, he would have to expose himself on the road, both to reach the market and to return. Both on the street and in the marketplace there was a great deal of shouting, noise, disorder, wagons creaking, wheels rumbling, horses stamping their hooves, pigs squealing, shopkeepers



jabbering, villagers shouting — in a word, a hubbub such as our Mikita had never seen in his dreams nor heard in any fever.

But what could he do? Having made a decision, he had to finish what he had begun. After sitting for a couple of hours among some weeds by a fence near the street, he became somewhat used to the noise. After looking around a bit to see the best route and method to use to reach his target, he gathered up his courage, took a run, and in a flash jumped over the fence and onto the road. The road was under a dust cloud raised by the many people who were walking and riding on it. Few people noticed the Fox, and of those who did none were interested in him — a dog is a dog, people thought, which made Mikita's day. He made himself as small as possible, and using a ditch, ran as quickly as he could to the marketplace where a long row of women sat with grain sieves, baskets and bags containing eggs, butter, fresh mushrooms, cloth, seeds, chickens, ducks and other good things like that for sale.

However, he had barely reached the marketplace when a dog ran toward him. From the opposite side, another dog was approaching, and there, ahead, he saw a third. Our Mikita would not be able to fool the dogs. They would quickly smell him out and, barking, furiously fall upon him! Lord, how frightful! Mikita twisted and turned like that fly in hot water. What could he do? Where could he hide? Thinking fast, he bounded to the nearest open exit and thence into the yard. There, he crouched and looked around for a place to hide, all the while keeping an ear cocked for the dogs. Oh, oh! He heard them! They were very close! Looking about, the Fox saw some sort of barrel standing in one corner of the yard, and without too much thought he leaped into the barrel to hide.

He was lucky, for he had barely jumped into the barrel when the dogs arrived — a whole pack of them — barking, snarling, sniffing about.

"He was here! He was here! Look for him!" the leaders called out.

The whole pack rushed about the very small yard, scraping, sniffing, scratching, but unable to find any sign of the Fox. A few times they approached the barrel, but the bad smell coming from it turned them away. Finally, unable to find him, they ran on farther. Mikita the Fox was safe.

Safe, but at what price!

The barrel which had so unexpectedly given him haven was half full of oil paint. For you see, in the house lived a painter who painted walls, fences and park benches. It just happened that the next day he



was supposed to paint a large stretch of fence and had, in preparation, mixed a barrel of paint and left it in the corner of the yard to have it ready.

Leaping into this solution, Fox Mikita had immediately sunk in it over his head, almost drowning. But then reaching the bottom of the barrel with his hind legs, he stood so that his whole body was covered with the paint and only his muzzle, also painted blue, was slightly above the paint. So he waited until the frightening peril had passed.

The unfortunate animal's heart was pounding, hunger churned his guts, the smell of the oil almost choked him, but what else could he have done? Thank God he was alive! Even that wasn't assured — suppose the painter came to the barrel and found him there?

However, there was nothing he could do about it. Scared almost to death, poor Fox Mikita had to stay quietly in the paint until nightfall, as he knew full well that if he appeared on the street in this condition then not only the dogs, but the people too, would fall upon him and not release him alive. Only after it was dark did Fox Mikita dare to jump quickly out of the barrel, streak across the road and, not meeting anyone, leap into the garden. From there, through the weeds, over the low hedges, past the cabbages and corn, he dashed into the forest. He left a long trail of blue tracks behind him before some of the paint rubbed off and the rest dried up.

It was already very dark when Mikita reached the forest, and he was not in that part of the woods near his home but in the completely opposite part. Tired, hungry and barely alive, he still had to run quite a way to get home. He did not have enough strength left to do it.

After refreshing himself somewhat with a few eggs he found in a quail's nest, he clambered into the first good empty lair he could find, burrowed over his head into some leaves which he gathered together, and fell asleep as though in the comfort of a stateroom.

Whether he awoke early or late the next day, the books do not tell. It is enough that after awakening from a sound sleep, yawning widely and spitting three times in the direction of the previous day's shameful adventure, he carefully, in the manner of foxes, left the den. Piter-patter! Sniff, sniff! The forest was quiet, peaceful, clean all over. The Fox's heart beat faster! "The best time for hunting," he thought. But at that moment he glanced at himself — dear God! He cried out in indignation. What was this? Fearfully, he started to run but, unfortunately, you cannot run away from yourself. He stopped and looked at himself again — was it really he? Was this his fur, his tail, his paws? No! He refused to accept it — so much the worse for him! He was some sort of wonderful and frightening dark blue animal with a terrible scent, covered with some sort of scales or thorny bumps, or quills like a hedgehog. His tail was not a tail, but something large and heavy almost like a thorny club.

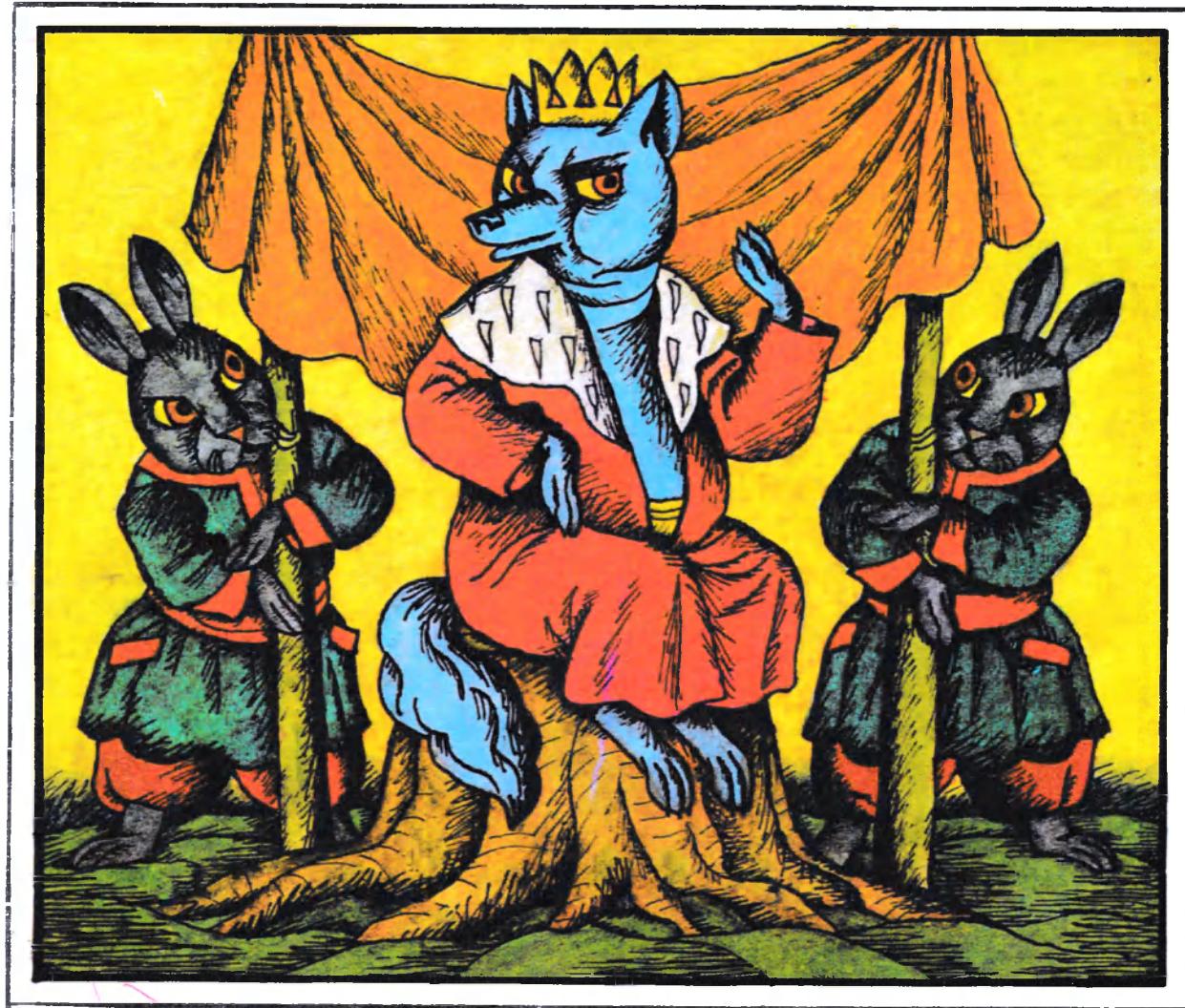
Mikita stopped and sniffed, considering the beauty he had become. He tried shaking himself — no result. He tried rolling around in the grass — no result. He tried to scratch the scales off with his paws — it hurt, but did not come off. He tried licking it — no result. He ran to the pond and jumped into the water to wash off the paint — no success. The oil paint had dried solid during the warm night in the den, and would not let go. Do what you will, God-forsaken Mikita!

At that moment, Brother Wolf happened by. The previous day, he had been well acquainted with our Mikita, but now, seeing such an unheard-of blue animal, all quills and bumps and with a heavy tail which might have been made of brass, he howled in fear. Gathering his senses, he ran off to give the alarm, barely whimpering. In the woods he met the She Wolf, farther along the Bear, the Boar, the Fawn. They all asked him what the problem was but he only sighed, opened his eyes wide, and babbled, "He's there! He's there! It's horrible! It's fierce!"

"But what is it?" his friends inquired.

"I don't know! I don't know! It's terrible!"

What was this monstrosity? The animals gathered around, trying to calm Brother Wolf, giving him water to drink. Monkey Fruzya pulled three hairs from between his eyes and threw them to the wind so that the Wolf's fears could be similarly dispersed. But nothing



worked. Since talking to the Wolf was a wasted effort, the animals decided to go together in the direction indicated by the Wolf, and see for themselves what it was that was so frightening. They reached the place where Fox Mikita was still running about. They took one look and ran away. What else could they do? Such an animal had never been seen nor heard of in all the time that the world and the forest had existed. Who could know its strength, the length of its fangs, the sharpness of its claws, or the shortness of its temper?

However much Mikita was troubled by his new appearance, he nevertheless was clearly aware of the effect that appearance had, first on the Wolf and now on the other animals.

"Well," the clever Fox thought to himself. "It's not such a bad thing that they are afraid of me. It could be very useful. Just wait, and I'll let you see me."

Lifting his tail and puffing himself up proudly, he went into the depth of the forest, where he knew there was a meeting place for all the forest's denizens. Meanwhile, word of the new, unheard-of and frightening beast had spread through the woods like wildfire. All the animals of the forest wanted to see this new guest, at least from afar, but none dared come too close. Fox Mikita, pretending not to notice this, walked with great dignity, as though in deep thought, until he came to the animals' meeting place. There he sat down on the stump usually reserved for the Bear. He sat and waited. Within a half hour, the animals and birds had gathered around the clearing in great numbers. They all wanted to know what sort of apparition this was, but all were afraid of it. None dared to approach it. They stood at a distance, trembling, ready to flee at any moment.

The Fox spoke to them first, gently. "My dear ones! Do not fear me! Come closer, for I have something very important to tell you."

But the animals did not come closer, and only the Bear, scarcely breathing, dared ask, "What are you?"

"Come closer, and I'll explain everything to you," the Fox coaxed gently. The animals moved a little closer, but were still afraid to come too close.

"Listen, my dear ones," the Fox said, "and be glad. This morning, Saint Michael made me of heavenly clay — see how blue it is — and breathing life into me, said, 'Quickwit! In the animal kingdom there reigns disorder, injustice and unrest. No one is secure in life or property. Go down to the earth and be the animals' tsar. Bring them order, rule them justly, let no one harm my animals!'"

Hearing this, the animals clapped.



"Oh, Lord! Then you are to be our benefactor, our tsar?"

"Yes, my children," the Fox said gravely.

An unprecedented happiness settled over the animal kingdom. They immediately set about establishing order. The eagles and the hawks hunted chickens, the wolves and bears cut up sheep and calves and set a huge pile of them before the new tsar who took some for himself and distributed the rest equitable among the hungry. Again there was joy, again there were cries of wonder and gratitude. What a tsar! What a benefactor! What an all-wise Solomon! With such a tsar, we shall live like gods till the end of time!

The days passed. Fox Mikita was a good tsar, just and kind, especially since he no longer had to go out hunting, trapping and killing for himself. His obliging ministers brought him everything ready, cut up, even plucked of hair or feathers. And his justice was the usual among animals — the stronger were first served, the weaker never won a case.

Under the new tsar, the animals lived entirely as they had without him. Whoever caught or found something ate, and whoever failed to catch anything went hungry. Whom the hunters killed had to die, and whoever escaped thanked God for his life. But all were glad that they had such a wise, powerful and kind tsar who, in addition, looked so different from the other animals.

Fox Mikita, having become tsar, lived as though it would go on forever. He had only one worry — that the paint would come off his fur, that the other animals would recognize who he really was. Therefore, he never went out in the rain, never went through thick bushes,

never scratched himself, and slept only on a soft feather bedspread. In general, he took care not to reveal before his ministers that he was a fox and not an animal called Quickwit.

A year passed. The anniversary of the day on which he had become tsar was approaching. The animals planned to celebrate that day annually and to have a great concert for that purpose. They formed a choir of foxes, wolves and bears, composed a beautiful cantata and, in the evening, following a great ceremony, dinner and speeches in honour of the tsar, they appeared and started to sing. Very beautiful! When the bears bellowed out their bass, the oaks trembled. The wolves each howled out a solo which moved the audience to tears. However, when the fox cubs dressed in native costume, yelped out in their thin tenor voices, the tsar could no longer contain himself. His heart overflowed. He let down his guard, and raising his muzzle, could not resist yelping like a fox!

Lord! What is this? All the singers immediately fell silent. The curtain suddenly fell from the eyes of all the ministers and aides to the tsar. Why, this was a fox! A common painted fox! And painted, furthermore, with cheap oil paint! Phoo! And we thought that he was something special! Oh, the liar! Oh, the fraud!

Forgetting his kindness and his celebrated wisdom, and feeling only anger that they had allowed him to deceive them for so long, they all fell upon the unfortunate Fox and tore him to shreds.

These events gave rise to a proverb. When a man believes a false friend and lets himself be fooled, when some mischievous fellow deceives us, fleeces us or slanders us, and we become a little wiser from the harm done to us, we say, "Oh, I've known it for a long time! I saw through him as easily as through a painted fox!"



THE CROW AND THE SNAKE

In the branches of a large hollow willow tree by a stream, the Crow built herself a nest. Not expecting any trouble, she laid her eggs, hatched them, and when the baby Crows had broken through the





shells of the eggs, the mother Crow flew off to look for food to feed her little ones.

But a black Snake had made a home for herself in the lower hollow of the willow. She had been waiting for just this, the appearance of the baby Crows, and when the mother Crow flew out of the nest, the Snake came out of hers and slithered to the nest, grabbed one of the baby Crows and carried it off for her lunch. The mother Crow returned and seeing that one of her babies was missing, cawed and lamented piteously, then stopped, for what else could she do? On the next day again, a second baby was missing. Before a week went by, the Crow's children, before even growing any feathers, all disappeared. And no matter how much the old mother Crow cawed and lamented — it didn't help.

She had to lay a fresh batch of eggs and hatch them. But the same disaster occurred to these. No sooner did the baby Crows peck their way out of the eggs and the mother fly off to get them food, then the Snake slithered up to the nest and day after day, took one baby Crow after another till they were all gone.

In time mother Crow found out who her terrible enemy was. She saw the Snake take her last baby out of the nest. Her laments were heard throughout the whole area but what of it? Although the Crow stood outside the Snake's burrow and cawed her heart out, rebuking and cursing the villainous robber, the Snake was feeding on her child and felt herself safe, knowing that the Crow could do nothing to her.

The Crow herself finally realized that her cries and tears would lead to nothing, so she went to her old crony, the Vixen, who lived not far, under a crooked birch, to ask her advice.

"Oh, dear friend," said the Crow, "tell me what to do with my vil-

lainous neighbour, the black Snake? She lives in the same willow that I do, to my sorrow! Twice now, I've hatched my children, and both times that cruel creature stole them, one by one, out of my nest and devoured them! And I can't get at her at all in her burrow."

The Vixen thought, shook her head, waved her tail, then said: "In this situation, old friend, one can't do anything by force. Here we have to use cunning."

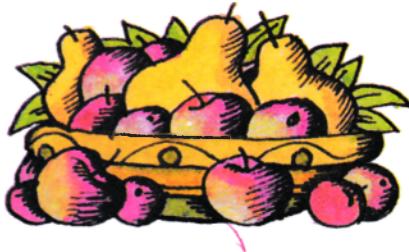
"Yes, I can see that for myself," said the Crow, "but to my sorrow, I can't think of a single cunning thing to do!"

"I'll tell you what, dear friend. The tsar's daughter very often comes to the stream to bathe. Be on the lookout for her. When the princess leaves her little golden chain on the shore, or any other shiny object, you grab it and fly off, but make sure that the princess's servants see you. They will shout and run after you, but you fly straight to the willow and throw that object into the Snake's burrow and fly away. You'll see then, what will happen."

The Crow listened to the Vixen's advice. As soon as the princess came to bathe in the stream and began to undress on the shore, laying her shiny, golden chain on the sand, the Crow flew up, grasped the chain in her beak and fled. The servants, seeing this, took after her with shouts. The Crow flew straight to her willow and threw the chain into the Snake's burrow then flew to a neighbouring tree to see what would happen.

The servants ran up to the tree. They had seen the Crow descend close to the ground here and then fly up without the chain. That meant that she must have dropped it somewhere around there! They began to hunt till finally one of them saw something shining at the bottom of the hollow trunk of the tree. They immediately began to dig and there, all curled up at the bottom, was a huge black Snake. The servants didn't stop to ask questions, knowing that the Snake didn't steal the chain, they just hauled her out of her nest and killed her, then took the chain.

The Crow was very happy, seeing the death of her enemy, and from that time on lived in peace.



THREE SACKS OF CUNNING

It happened in the fall. A Vixen was running along a field path when she met a Hedgehog.

“A good day to you, Hedgehog, old dear!” she shouted.

“Good health to you, sister Vixen,” answered the Hedgehog.

“You know what, Hedgehog, come with me!”

“And where may the Lord be taking you?”

“Why, I’m going over there, to the orchard, to eat grapes.”

“But aren’t they sour, Vixen?”

“Of course they aren’t sour! The white-winged Magpie was saying that she heard from the Coon, the young maiden, that she saw the farmer tasting and praising their sweetness and saying that it was time they were picked.”

“No, Vixen,” said the Hedgehog, “I won’t go with you, I’m afraid. The farmer is wise and he’s probably set a trap and I could get caught.”

“Don’t be afraid, Hedgehog, old dear!” the Vixen laughed. “I have three sacks of cunning and I wouldn’t be me if I couldn’t get you out of a trap.”

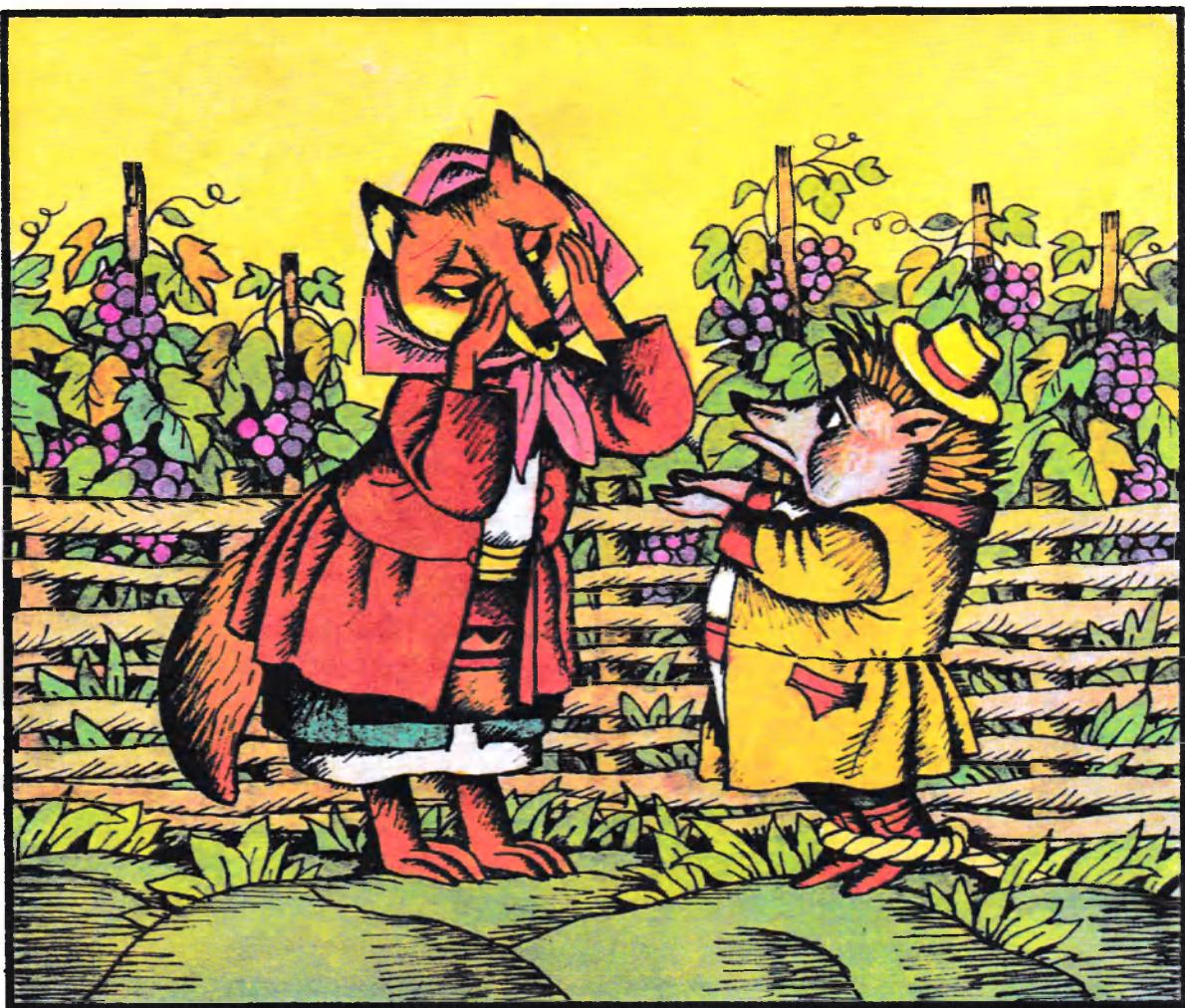
“Well, if you say so, then let it be so!”

They set off together, crawled into the orchard, had their fill of grapes and were ready to leave when — snap! The Vixen had carelessly stepped into a trap and was caught. She tugged once, she tugged a second time — no way! The trap held fast, holding her by the paw.

“Oh brother Hedgehog!” cried the Vixen. “Save me!”

“How can I save you, dear Vixen,” answered the Hedgehog. “Dig up those three bags of cunning you told me about and save yourself.”

“But I have no bags!” lamented the Vixen, trembling with fear. “You see, I was jumping over a stream and all three sacks broke loose and fell into the water. Oh Hedgehog, little brother, think, maybe you can find a spot of cunning in yourself?”



"I have only one," answered the Hedgehog, "but I don't know if it will appeal to you. Lie down on the spot where you have been caught, spread your legs out around you and hold your breath as long as possible. The farmer will think that you are already dead and throw you over the fence."

The Vixen followed the Hedgehog's advice, held her breath and lay there as if long dead. The farmer came, saw her, and held his nose.

"What a shame!" he said. "I haven't been here a few days and here is a beautiful Vixen, caught and already beginning to decay. What good is she to me now? I'll throw her over the fence and that will be it."

He released the Vixen from the trap, took her carefully by the tail and threw her over the fence. This is exactly what the Vixen wanted. She sprang to her feet and scampered off, leaving only a rustle in the weeds behind her.

Two days went by, four days, the Vixen is again running along the field path and meeting the Hedgehog.

"A good day to you, Hedgehog, old dear!"

"Good health to you, sister Vixen," answered the Hedgehog.

"Come with me to the orchard to eat grapes."

"Aren't you afraid, Vixen, after what happened before yesterday?"

"Oh, that's nothing. I've got me three sacks of cunning and will find some way out."

They went together, crawled into the orchard, ate their fill of grapes and were ready to return when suddenly — snap! The Hedgehog, poor fellow, had not been careful and got caught in a trap.

"Oh Vixen, dear sister," he cried wretchedly, "I've been caught in the trap and it won't let me go! Take out your three sacks of cunning and get me out of this noose!"

"Oh, poor dear," said the Vixen, "my cunning has disappeared, to the very last sack. I was jumping over a stream and all three sacks broke loose and plunged into the water."

"Ha, then I guess its God's will that I must die here. Farewell, sister Vixen! Forgive me all my sins, all the offences I may have given you!"

"God will forgive you, Hedgehog," said the Vixen, wiping the tears from her eyes, "and I forgive you with all my heart."

"Come, sister Vixen, let us embrace once more in farewell!"

The Vixen embraced the Hedgehog, even though she found it distasteful. But what could she do, the poor fellow was preparing for death, so how could she refuse him this last pleasure?

"Kiss me, sister Vixen, right on my mouth," begged the Hedgehog, "why, we've lived all our lives like brother and sister."

The Vixen leaned forward and barely touched his lips with her tongue when the Hedgehog snapped. He grabbed her tongue between his teeth and held on. No matter how the Vixen turned and squirmed, cried and whimpered, the Hedgehog held onto her tongue until the farmer came. Seeing that the Hedgehog was caught in the trap and was holding the Vixen by the tongue, the farmer burst out laughing, killed the Vixen and released the Hedgehog from the trap, letting him go.



HOW THE ANIMALS BROUGHT THE PEOPLE TO COURT

I

Ancient tales and books tell us that in far-off distant times people were primitive. They lived in forests and caves, hid in catacombs and burrows. There were few of them; they were simple-minded: they knew nothing of fire, steel, or any other metal; they lived on the fruit of various trees, berries and the roots of various plants; dressed in the leaves and bark of trees and had to hide from the animals because they were much stronger, better armed and more numerous than people.

This went on for many, many years. It took a long time for people to learn to master fire, to make implements from flint, arrows, axes, and spears. As time went on they learned about other metals: bronze, copper, steel; they domesticated some of the animals and with their help they mastered the earth. Making these advances, they also grew in number, came out of the forests, learned to build homes, villages and cities, and in time became masters of the finest lands in the world. The animals, who up to that time were the rulers of the earth, moved about freely and knew nothing of waging war, except that which was demanded for their survival, found that they had a new enemy

on earth, a hundred times more frightening than hunger. It was an enemy that never knew satisfaction or content, cunning and mighty; an enemy that reached out to the Fish in the water, to the Bird in the air, to the Deer in the forest and to the Badger in his burrow. It was everywhere, it made everything its business and found a method to control everything. Whether it was the tiny Caterpillar, the Beetle, the Worm, the Grasshopper, or the larger Wolves, Eagles, Alligators, and Lions, it declared war on all, because all in one way or another, got in its way, and none found themselves safe before it. This terrible enemy was Man.

The war between Man and beast went on for centuries. It came to pass that Man captured and turned many animals into his slaves and murdered many more while banishing others into far forests, gorges and steppes. They had to hide before him in impassable places, just as Man at one time hid before them. They grew fewer and fewer, because all that got into Man's way was destroyed. Even the fate of those animals who served Man became worse as time went on. They were forced to work harder and harder, or else they were fed only to be butchered to provide him food and clothing.

But suddenly, after many thousands of years had passed, an all-wise King Solomon appeared on earth; not only wise, but just, one who had never existed up to that time. He was king not only over all the people, but the animals as well. He understood the language of every animal and he passed laws that were to guide the life of all living creatures on earth with justice. These laws were proclaimed and applied not only to people, but to all living beings on earth.

On hearing about this king and his wise laws, the animals began to think that perhaps it was time to rid themselves of this merciless, insatiable enemy that was Man, and win back their old freedom and rule over the earth. So all the wild and the tame animals enslaved by Man got together and agreed to send emissaries to King Solomon, one from each of the species, and demand, according to the law, the return of their former freedoms and independence from Man. The only one among them who opposed the idea was the Dog. He remained loyal to Man and told him what the animals had decided. On hearing this the people, knowing the king's sense of justice, immediately chose the wisest among them and sent them to King Solomon, with the idea that someone should be there to defend them when the animals began to present their complaints to the king.

The emissaries of both the animals and the people arrived before the king at just about the same time and told him the purpose of their



visit. Realizing that the problem was likely to become a long court action between the animals and the people, King Solomon ordered that the emissaries be treated well and hospitably for three days so that they might have a good rest after their long journey. In the meantime he sent couriers to the far ends of the earth to bring all the wisest lawmakers from among the people and the best legal minds to this king's tribunal. When the three days had passed they were all called to the king's presence.

II

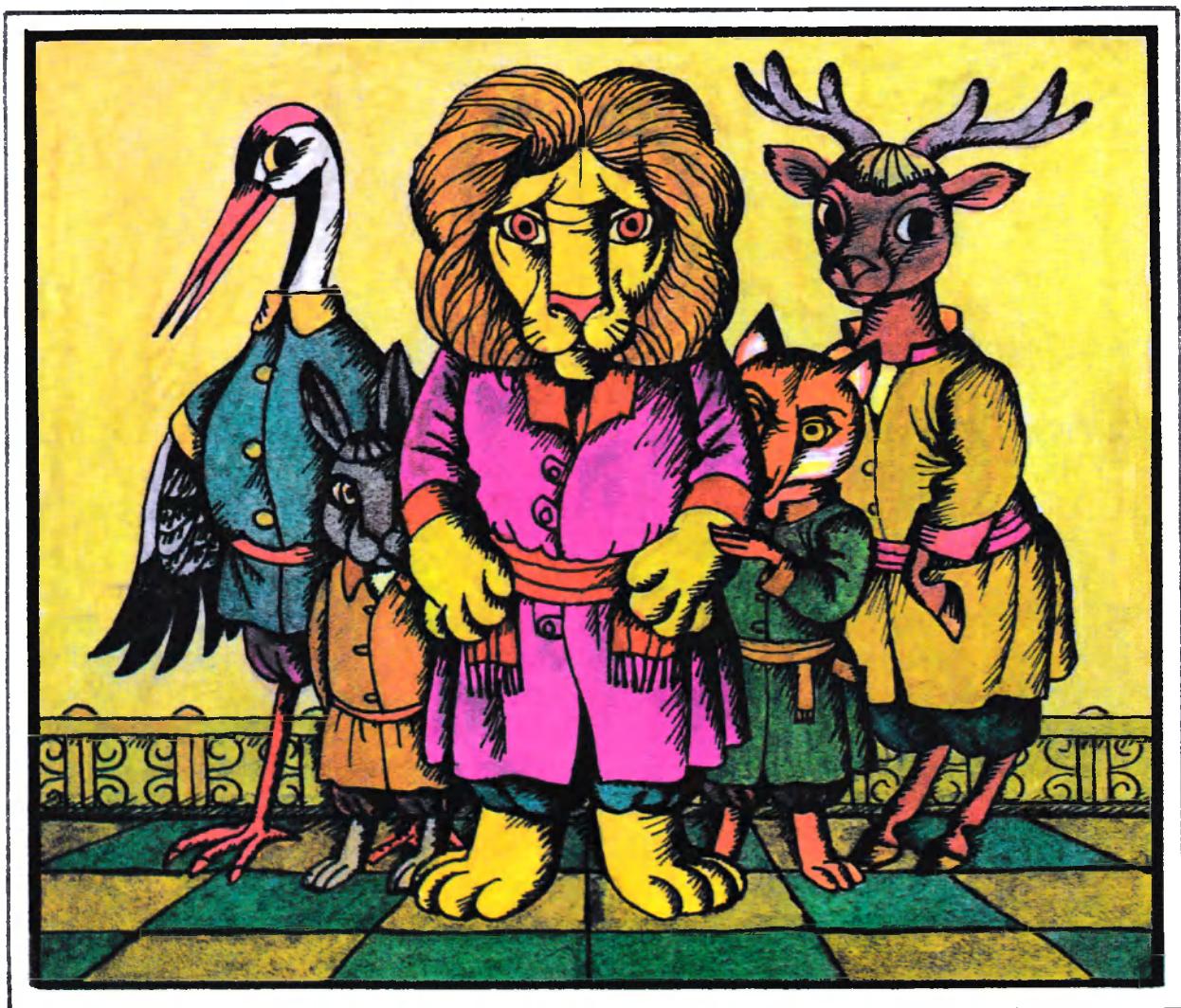
The king sat on his throne in the huge Palace of Justice. On his right and left sat the learned members of his tribunal. Then the emissaries were allowed in and stood before them — the people on the right, the animals on the left. After bowing low before the king they stood silent. The Summoner then presented the case:

“Before Him Most Serene Highness, King Solomon, and his most just tribunal, stand the emissaries representing all the animals and emissaries from the people, submitting to the all-wise King's Court in their dispute. Will those who are prosecuting the case step forward!”

One of the animal emissaries stepped forward, bowed to the very ground before the king and the entire august company, then spoke the following words:

“Almighty and all-wise King Solomon! In the name of these, my comrades, who were sent along with me from the large assembly of all the animals, I stand before you with hope in your great sense of justice

which shines its rays on animals and people alike. It is not secret to you, in your wisdom, that at one time the animals were the masters of the earth. The people lived in the forest and the caves, hiding before us, afraid of our fangs, our claws and our horns. They were nature's stepchildren, naked and defenceless, weak and small in number. They regarded us with terror and in their ignorance they more than once regarded us as gods, voluntarily offering us their children, young maidens or old people in sacrifice to gain our good favour. But as time went on our relations changed. They began to grow in number, mastered the secret of fire, and with the help of some of us, especially the traitor, Dog, they were able to enslave many among us and declare a continuous, uninterrupted war against us. Today, all-powerful king, all of us animals have been reduced to extreme misery. We have to take refuge in forest and in burrow, hide ourselves from the blessed sun and never, by day or by night, be sure of our lives or our freedom. Man has invented the bow and arrow, nets and traps, kills us whenever he sees us. He catches us in snares, digs deep pits on the paths we travel, covering them with rushes so that we, going through at night, would fall in and become his victims. Neither the forests, nor the mountains, the water, the air, nor the underground, protect us any more against Man's greed and malice; he can reach us everywhere, we are everywhere in danger from him. Those among us who have surrendered to him, have found an even worse fate. He has turned us into his slaves and deals with us heartlessly. With some, he fetters their feet, with others he places a yoke on their neck; still others are forced to carry heavy loads on their backs while he grasps a whip or a club and beats their sides, making them run and haul beyond their strength. Very often he takes the children from their mothers, slaughtering or selling them before their very eyes so as to feed himself and his children with their meat and milk. We never hear a word of comfort or advice from him, but always and everywhere have to endure his cursing and harsh words. Our wounds and bruises, our suffering and exhaustion, our tears and our death — nothing moves his heart. But this is not all. Even after death he gives us no peace. He quarters and cuts up our bodies, tears off our hides, pulls out our horns, rips out our entrails, cuts the meat away from our bones, boils, roasts and fries it. Even our bones are ground up or burned. And what's more, in all these acts and unheard of wickedness, he sees nothing wrong, feels no blame on his conscience, excusing himself by saying we have no soul and in heartless arrogance claiming the soul for himself alone. This, O great and all-powerful king, is our



grievance and the cause of our bloody tears before you. Judge us and our sworn enemy with justice, so that we and our descendants could bless your happy rule into eternity."

After listening to the presentation of the animals' case, the king bowed his head, thought deeply, then turned to the people and said:

"Well, people, you have heard the accusation the animals have made against you?"

"We heard," answered the people.

"And have you understood it all?"

"We understood."

"Well, what have you to say for yourselves?"

An emissary from among the people stepped forward and, bowing low before the king and to the whole assembly, said:

"Allow me, Almighty King, to present the case in the name of the people's representatives."

"Speak," said the king.

III

"It's all true," began the peoples' emissary, "what had been said here by the complainants. People, once weak, unarmed, afraid and small in number became, in time, strong, numerous and armed. They conquered the animals and began to rule the earth. But did they do this wilfully or with evil intent? Wasn't this God's will? Does it not say in the Holy Writ that God created the earth and all that is in it, and in the end created Man to rule over it and all its fruits? It was said in the complaint that the animals were the first rulers on earth, and that the people were the off-shoots of nature. But why and by what means did a change come about? In their struggle with nature and its contradictions, people developed their strength, their ability to think, and so gained power, while the animals, proud of their earlier superiority, stopped developing themselves, neglected their growth and sank into exile or slavery. If there is fault on any side, it is in no way the fault of the people.

"The animals are grieved that Man has made them slaves and maltreats them. But they forget that Man takes care of his slaves far better than they can take care of themselves. Wild Sheep would long ago have been destroyed by the teeth and claws of Wolves and other beasts of prey, but domesticated by Man they cover, in innumerable numbers, the broad steppe and the highland meadows. How many wild Horses, Oxen or Goats would have remained, and how many are now



living in human habitations? The animals are grieved at the hard work they have to do in slavery. But does Man himself laze around? Does not Man himself accept heavy labour, and not only for himself but for their good also? Does he not cut them grass and dry them hay, build them pens and barns, water them from wells, prepare straw for them to sleep on, clean their stalls? Does he not feed, water and clean them? And if one of them becomes ill does not Man take care of them as members of his family, look for a doctor to help in their cure? Does Man deliberately treat animals cruelly? To the contrary, he thought up the yoke for the Ox so as not to attach the reins to his horns and for the Horse, the collar, so that the lines and the braces wouldn't choke his neck. He covers him when it's cold, shoes him for the road so they could walk securely, digs mountain passes, builds bridges over rivers which he himself could cross by boat. No," ended the speaker for the people, "when the animals complain that they are slaves to Man, then Man can also complain that he is, to some extent, a slave to the animals, a slave to his slaves. But Man does not complain. He knows that service makes service, that social ties really lie in the fact, that united together — be they animals or people — have to give up part of their own welfare, their own convenience and freedom to rise to greater heights, greater mutual well-being."

When he had finished, King Solomon turned to the animals.

"You heard the spokesman for the people? Do you have anything to say in return?"

"We have," answered the animals, and their emissary stepped forward again and said:

"Almighty and all-wise king! All that the spokesman for the people has said comes down to two points. One is that he refers to the Holy Writ, by which, it seems, our slavery is legalized, and the other in his alluding to all the benevolence and services which the animals, he says, receive from Man. Let us examine these two points separately!

"I firmly disagree that the Holy Writ decrees that animals are to be in eternal slavery to Man. When it is said there that Man was created to rule the earth, then it must be understood that he stands higher in rank from all other of God's creations, at the top of that ladder on which we, the other animals, stand on the lower rungs. His rule then relates not only to the animals, but to all nature: to the rivers, mountains, the land and the oceans. Nowhere is it said that Man's rule over the animals should be any different than his rule over other creations of nature. And even less is said there that Man's rule over some animals should be different than over others; that some should be kept in slavery and others regarded as exceptions to any rights whatsoever, to be hounded and destroyed at every step and in every way. Let it be so then — that Man is king over nature. But the king in his kingdom should be just and generous, respect the rights of all his subjects and not be guided by malice and wilfullness. A kingdom where only oppression exists, lawlessness and war against everyone, cannot be founded on the Holy Writ; this is not a kingdom according to the laws of God, but one uninterrupted crime.

"The people are basing their appeal on the Holy Writ," continued the animals' emissary, "so we will also do this. True, it is said there that Man must rule over the animals, but it isn't said that he must butcher and eat them. To the contrary, it says very clearly that God gave them all growing things that produced seeds, and all the trees that produced fruit and said: 'This will be your food.' That people should kill the animals for their food cannot be found anywhere in the Bible.

"But this is not enough! When Man in his greed and stupidity violated God's will and was exiled from Eden, then God again told him clearly: 'You must feed on the spoils of the field,' and added, 'You will eat your bread by the sweat of your brow.' But nowhere is it said that he must eat his bread by the sweat of the Ox, the Horse, the Donkey, or the Camel. The burden of work God laid on Man himself, and justly, because Man transgressed God's bequest and sinned. The animals did not sin, so they should not suffer punishment. On what basis does Man presume to load us with the yoke, the rein, the horse-collar and the halter? He is only completing his original sin,



substituting us for his punishment, which God put on him and him alone.

"Now I will say a few words about Man's benevolence toward the animals which he feels is so praiseworthy. He forgets, while doing so, that all this lovely benevolence flows not out of the goodness of his heart, not out of feelings of justice and love, but out of dirty self-love. Man protects us because he sees in us his property, his wealth, his profit. In the same way, but perhaps even more, he protects his soulless gold and silver, to no one but himself, useless rock. And when he says that because of us he makes himself extra work, then we will ask him if he doesn't also make himself a lot of extra work when he digs into the earth for gold, silver, iron and other minerals for himself, and pearls and other adornments; to build huge and of no use to anybody pyramids, towers and stone walls? No, Man is not a slave to us, he is a slave to his own greed, his arrogance and other caprices. We have never begged Man for help in our misery. In our wild state we were very well able to defend ourselves from our foes, helped ourselves in our illnesses. We were healthy, strong and beautiful. Only with Man's unfortunate rule is there confusion in all of nature, with many new diseases, earlier unknown. God's punishment, given Man in Eden, has been passed on to us like an epidemic, and we must now suffer doubly for his guilt."

Having listened to this presentation on behalf of the animals, King Solomon turned to the people.

"You have heard the points presented by the animals in their defence? What do you have in answer to them?"

The people's emissary stepped forward and said:

"We'll answer in short. The animals are defending themselves with the Holy Writ, saying that there is no clear permission there for Man to kill animals. This is a completely incorrect defence. There is no clear permission for this because there is a clear example from God himself. It is said there that God, in banishing our ancestors, gave them animal skins for clothing. What does this mean? Obviously, nothing else but the fact that God himself destroyed certain animals and skinned them, thereby giving man an example that he must also do the same.

"The animals say that God punished only one Man in Eden and placed the burden of work on him. This is completely untrue. They forget that Man did not sin by himself, but was brought to sin by the Snake, an animal. Therefore God punished the Snake before Man, and through the Snake, the entire animal kingdom. Certainly, all the animals in Eden lived in peace, were friendly with each other and with

Man. Is it Man's fault then, that hostility developed between the animals and Man? And do the animals realize that if it wasn't for God's will, Man would not have been able to overcome their rule and become ruler himself? In rising against Man's leadership, they are rising against the order which God Himself established on earth; in wanting to free themselves from Man, they want what is impossible and contrary to the development of all nature."

Having heard both sides — the accused and the defence — King Solomon closed the proceedings and postponed them to the following day, giving orders that the emissaries be guests of the palace, as before.

IV

Finding themselves alone, the animal emissaries began to think of how their lawsuit was progressing and what they should do next.

"The situation is not too good," said the representative from the Horses. "We've put too much blame on Man's shoulders and if he should justify himself, even from some of the blame, then we will lose."

But the representative from the Wolves disagreed.

"How can we justify himself? How can he justify himself from what is obvious to anyone without prejudice?"

"But don't forget, Wolf," said the Elephant, "that our judge is also a Man. And though he is just, still his mind is that of a human, as are his eyes, so he would be far more inclined to see things from their point of view rather than a Wolf's."

Here the emissary representing the Pigs said:

"Me and my family, to tell the truth, are entirely indifferent to this whole case. What grievance can I possibly have against Man? He feeds me, doesn't make me work, looks after me, provides me with a pen and in the winter lines it with straw in which I can burrow up to my ears and sleep until I am called to the trough. Even the acorns, which I love, Man gathers for me in the fall, dries and stores for my pleasure all winter. As for the fact that he butchers me, what calamity is there in that? When I was wild, the Bear and the Wolf killed me, even my little ones were snatched by the Fox, the Badger, the Lynx and other wretched beasts. Then is it not the same for me to die from the teeth of these plunderers or from the knife of Man? No, it is not the same. The animals tear at me with their teeth, pull me apart and mutilate me alive, while Man kills me quickly. An animal eats some

of my meat and buries the rest so that often it just rots and is lost, but a Man cleans and cuts carefully, cooking some, he dresses for the future or makes sausages. And just think of the joy in the human family when my roast appears on the table, my sausages, my head or my feet in jellied form! No, you can say what you like, I have no grievance against Man and I don't want to appear in court against him any more."

"I don't want to, either," said the Horse.

"Me neither," said the Cat. "You know very well that even people envy me my life. I do no work of any kind and the service I give, catching Mice, is my greatest pleasure and enthusiasm. During the day, of course, I relax by the fire, play with the children, and no matter how poor my owners, I get my share of milk along with the children. It's no wonder that people have coined the proverb that only the Cat and the Priest enjoy life in this world. So I've got to say that it would be a sin for me to complain against Man."

With these words all three representatives left the assembled animals and joined the people.

The other animals lowered their heads dejectedly at this desertion.

"At last I see that our affairs are in bad shape," said the Elephant, "now that our comrades have lost faith in their validity..."

"Ha, I don't care about such comrades!" the Lion said, proudly. "What kind of a comrade is a Pig to me! An animal without character — dull, stupid and thick-skinned!"

The Elephant, insulted, swung his trunk. You see, the Pig was a distant relative, for he, too, was thick-skinned.

"Now, now," he answered the Lion, somewhat sharply, "don't be too harsh on the thick-skinned. They have their own reasoning and character. As for desertion from our joint problem, you saw for yourself that your beloved relative, the Cat, is not a hair's breadth better than the Pig. He's concerned with his own comfort, but as far as supporting our common concerns— that's it!"

"Well, I'm not surprised at either the Pig or the Cat," said the Bear. "They are animals whose own comfort and own skin is most important. But the Horse! Just think a bit about his action! Why he, perhaps, is the most oppressed of all the animals. How many ways has Man thought out to utilize his strength, his health, his life and body! He rides on him, placing a saddle on his back, he loads his spine with various burdens, he puts him in harness and makes him pull loaded wagons and sleds. And as if that isn't enough, how many times does man, for his own recreation, drive him and make him run with all his



might in races, or just for the sport? How many times has the poor Horse, while running madly and jumping across ditches, fences and other barriers, broken his leg, his back or neck and died on the spot! And that's not enough! Man has made the Horse his partner in his most wicked actions against us, and against his brother-man. Would there be any hunts for some of our animals without the Horse? And more important — the Horse has helped Man in his wars with other men, is killed by the thousands in battle, sheds his blood and offers his bones for causes he doesn't in the least understand and which are of no interest to him whatsoever. But even this is not enough! Man loves him while he is vital and strong, feeds him, curries and keeps him clean, sometime even kissing him; but at the same time he will not eat his meat and when he gets old, crippled and can work no more, he turns him out into the forest as food for the Wolves, or after death, throws his body to the Dogs and Crows. Now tell me, where after all this, does the Horse get such allegiance to Man?"

"The brilliant harnesses, no doubt, have dazzled him!" commented the Goat. "I've often seen him in harness: clean, shining, not knowing what foot to stand on; his head high, looking back at himself, jerking at his reins and trotting along, completely carried away with his trappings of bondage! It must be that servility has become so much a part of his character that in favour of these decorations he had forgotten about freedom and independence."

"Enough, let's have no more talk about these deserters," said the Elephant reasonably. "Let's think about our problems! What do we do next? Do we stand by our position or do we retreat in good time? Do we support what our emissaries have said, or do we look for new witnesses and arguments to support us?"

"I think we should let it alone! Why should we look for trouble?" the Hippopotamus spoke up. "My advice is simple. Man lives on the land — we take to the water — there we would be safer. He hunts by day and sleeps during the night — we move from living by day to living by night, so that we meet as rarely as possible. That would be the best solution."

"Always, the thick-skinned is thick-skinned," the Lion could not resist snarling at the Hippopotamus. "Well, I feel such a rage that if the verdict should go against us, I'm prepared to throw myself at this so wise King Solomon and tear him to pieces."

"A Cat's wisdom is no better than that of a Chicken!" the Elephant was disdainful. "And what are you going to prove by that? As if you didn't know that the king is surrounded by an armed guard and you



would come face to face with their axes if you should attack him? You'll destroy yourself and do nothing to help us."

"Maybe," said the Bear, licking his chops, "maybe we should recall the old proverb: he who greases, rides? We've come here in our stupidity, to face the king with empty hands and have stood before the tribunal with empty hands — so how can we expect to win? Now, if we had given every member of the tribune a hive of cream honey... I'd have consoled myself for this loss for the general good."

"Bah, you fool!" shouted a number of the wiser animals. "He thinks that because he loves honey, everyone else would be ready to sell his soul and conscience for it. Go and get lost with your abominable honey that the Bees have squeezed out of their stomachs. What a dainty he found to offer! Phew!"

The Bear, hearing these inventions and sarcasms, became very embarrassed, and mumbling something under his nose about lack of taste in these stupid beasts, went off into a corner and crouching there, listened to the continuing talk.

"God save us from taking the step advised by Burmilo," warned the Elephant. "Our lawsuit is honest and if we were to try to bribe the tribunal we would definitely lose, and in shame at that. If we conduct our case civilly, we would have no cause for shame, even if we lose. But maybe we won't lose after all. Listen! I've just got another idea, and that thanks to the Bear's suggestion. Now the peoples' advocate told the tribunal that the animals were themselves to blame for their downfall after having been rulers of the earth. He said that people worked and developed while the animals wasted their time, learned nothing, and lost what they had. Now let's try to prove tomorrow that this

isn't true, that the animals too, at least some of them, didn't waste their time in idleness and sloth and learned something from mother nature."

"How will we do that?" asked the animals in one voice.

"Let's send emissaries to the Bees and the Ants right away. These insects, though tiny, are very well organized. They have their state, build fortresses and strongholds, stores, send out colonies, gather provisions and live in such well-ordered relationship that even people could learn much from them. The best example will be that not only people, but animals too, even such insignificant creatures as the Bees and the Ants have the ability to achieve a high degree of civilization."

The animals very happily agreed to the Elephant's advice and immediately chose emissaries to the Bees and the Ants. They would ask them to send their representatives to King Solomon's tribunal.

V

The next day King Solomon sat on his throne among his tribunal and again the emissaries of the animals and the people stood before them.

"Does anyone among you have anything new to add to that which was said yesterday?" asked the king.

"We have something more," answered the animal emissaries.

"Speak then!" said the king.

"Almighty king and most illustrious tribunal," began the animal emissary, "yesterday the people's emissary stated that we, the animals, are ourselves to blame for losing our rule over earth. Seemingly, while people struggled, developed and grew in intelligence and strength, cooperated and worked together, the animals did not advance, but remained in their primitive state and had to give way to the people. Today we have witnesses to show that this is not the fault of the animals, but the fault of Man and his greed. When the greater number of animals developed late, declined in number, lost their earlier place of location and the finest conditions for growth, it's because all this was taken by Man! He very diligently sees to it that animals have no opportunity to develop. He would gladly keep us eternally inferior and in decline because this guarantees his domination over us. Where his hand and ruinous influence has not yet reached, there the animals are now becoming not only stronger, better, more beautiful, braver and stronger in character, but more intelligent. That they are not backward in growth and organization can be shown in a thousand ways. Do not the Birds build their nests out of the most

wretched of materials, without any tools, yet so masterfully that no human craftsman can equal them? Do not the Horses and Oxen in their herds know how to defend themselves against danger, some among them standing with their heads facing into a circle and kicking back, while others face out and use their horns? Do not the Cranes and Bustards serve even people as examples of vigilance, placing guards in times of feeding and night rest? Does not the Raven manage to drink water from a glass with a narrow neck by throwing pebbles into it to make the water rise? But we have even better witnesses to these facts, the kind that can confirm without a doubt how animals, even the most insignificant in size, not to say brainless, manage to wisely regulate their life when Man doesn't stand in their way."

"Who are these witnesses?" asked King Solomon.

"The Bees and the Ants," answered the animal emissary. "Allow them, Almighty King, to stand before your illustrious eyes."

The king waved his scepter and the representatives of the Bees and the Ants were brought in.

"Do you know the case before my throne and this illustrious tribunal?" asked the king.

"We do. Whether Man should have priority on earth or not."

"Good. Then what do you have to add to this case?"

"We would, Almighty King, say only this," began the representative of the Ants, "that when you take our community order into consideration, and our skill, then people are far from measuring up to us. We can, from the finest particles, pebbles and twigs, build constructions that are beyond Man's ability to do so. We dig underground tunnels, put up walls, build towers, bridges and corridors, can communicate without talking and find our way in our windowless homes. We know about the division of labour, carry on wars, keep milk cattle and sow fields of hay for them. Some of us even have slaves."

"And we live in a very well-managed monarchy," contributed representative from the Bees, "have a division of labour organized to the highest degree of efficiency, build buildings even more skilfully than the Ants, and gather in them the means of our nourishment, which no one outside of ourselves, is capable of doing, least of all Man. We can proudly say that Man not only didn't help us in this development, but to the contrary, stretched a greedy hand in our direction as well. When it pleases him, he drives us out of our place of abode or destroys us completely so that he may profit from our property."

"What do you have to say in answer to this?" asked the king, turning to the people's emissary.

“Well, perhaps that this evidence doesn’t prove anything. By the time Man had struggled to his present state, the animals had the upper hand and hindered him at every moment of his life, every step toward his development, even more so than Man hindered them. In spite of this he has risen to command through a strong will and untiring labour, which now the animals wish to take from him by the king’s verdict and at great cost. The animals cannot say that Man completely bars their way to development. How often has Man suffered and tired himself teaching the Bear to dance, the Horses and Dogs various tricks, the Parrot, the Rook and the Raven to talk and the Blackbird to whistle. And what has he gained from it? The animals are not capable of passing that which they have learned to younger generations, so that with each new generation they must begin their education anew. As to their selfbuilt dwellings, they are, of course, attractive, but the trouble is, that once having learned to construct them, neither the Bees, nor the Ants have in all these thousands of years been able to take even one little step forward, to show at least one improvement in them. Also, they have nothing so much to be proud of in their community life. With the Bees this way of life is built on the enslavement of their female gender and on the annual destruction of their males. With the Ants, it is built on slavery, which in some of their colonies has come to the point that the ruling body cannot even feed themselves without the help of their slaves. Is this supposed to be a sign of their superiority over Man, or the basis for their equality with him?”

At this point the king willed the case to be closed. Both contending parties were asked to leave the hall until the king had consulted with his counsellors as to the verdict in this difficult case. They had to wait a long time. The tribunal was divided in opinion and there were animated disputes. Finally, after three hours everyone was called back into the hall and the Summoner shouted loudly:

“Will everyone stand to hear the verdict!”

A deep silence descended on the hall. King Solomon, without rising from his throne, stated:

“Having listened to the two contending sides and the opinions of the illustrious consultants called to this tribunal, I, King Solomon, by the power granted me from above, proclaim that in this lawsuit between the animals and the people, the verdict is that the animals must be subordinated to Man, and Man to the animals.”

“How is that?” asked all the emissaries in one voice.

“Like this. Those animals who have to this moment served Man



must continue serving him. Those who have lived in freedom, fought with Man or fled from him, will more and more submit to his superiority, their numbers will keep decreasing and Man will invent ever new and better methods for their destruction."

"Where is the second part of this verdict, All-wise King?" cried the animal emissaries imploringly.

"With the animals that serve him, Man must behave as with servants close to him in character and destiny. He must treat them as creatures that are born, grow, feel hunger and thirst, pain and joy, sorrow and happiness, just as he does. Those who are his enemies, he may kill without unnecessary pangs of remorse."

"But where is the second part of the verdict, All-wise King?" again the animal emissaries cried.

"For those animals that serve him, Man must be responsible, must work and be concerned about them, look after them in sickness and injuries," continued King Solomon.

"This he will do for his own advantage, All-wise King!" said the animals. "But what about the second half of the verdict promised us?"

"You blind fools!" cried King Solomon, growing angry, and lifting his right hand he picked up a small black, wand-like baton, with a diamond at its end that was lying on an embroidered cushion beside him.

"Now, all who are present here, look closely at the stone at the end of this wand," said the king, and lifted the wand and held it straight before him.

All turned their eyes toward the diamond.

"What do you see?"

"We can't see anything," answered the assembled in one voice. "The brilliance of the stone has blinded us."

"And now?" asked the king, waving the wand in a half circle.

A low moan went through the hall, cries of amazement and fear, without clear speech. All stared goggle-eyed at the unexpected miracle.

The swing of the wand brought an eerie light into the hall. Everything in it became suddenly larger than life; its distance from their eyes also grew so great that it seemed to recede and become somehow transparent, like shadows in a light fog. In reverse, everyone saw that which was fairly close clearly — innumerable tiny particles — globes, twigs, needles, crosses and threads. They flew about in dense clouds through the air, floated in currents at every move, and with each breath of air attached themselves in millions to everything



where they found the least bit of nourishment — a drop of saliva, liquid, paste or sweat and grew, feasted, swelled and fell apart, leaving behind them a tiny drop of poison fluid. Right there before everyone's eyes, within a few minutes, all could see how, on their neighbours, their bodies, their eyes; in their ears, mouth, blood, lungs (all bodies in this miraculous light became transparent, the larger body seemed to disappear and in its place all that was tiny and invisible to the naked eye could be seen), thousands of these miraculous creatures grew in millions of nests, and with every moment threatened to poison, suck up, to destroy every large body. The amazed emissaries saw how these mysterious little creatures left out nothing and nobody, attaching themselves even to the walls, to stone and polished columns, adhering everywhere, sucking, chewing without teeth and multiplying continually in a terrible way and in unheard-of numbers.

On looking closer, however, they noticed that these tiny creatures, though without eyes, mouth, or any other tools and seemingly almost alike, did reveal differences and, correspondingly, hostility among themselves. The globes attacked the twigs and devoured them; the twigs in their turn made themselves hateful to the platelets, spangles or other globes. Within this secret world there existed a continuous struggle, more violent than in the world accessible to the eyes of people and animals. Here millions died in seconds, but at the same time, millions were born. In truth, there were no births or deaths here, because all wavered between two brinks; the globes swelled and divided into two — not dead, but living, smaller globes.

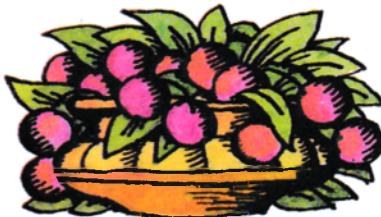
All present stood there a long time, stunned at this unexpected sight.

"Do you see now who is actually your ruler and your enemy?" asked King Solomon and waved his wand in the other direction. The miraculous spectacle vanished.

"These tiny creatures are not concerned with your disputes," continued the king. "Invisible and unknown to us, they lay seige, devour and fill us continuously. Your body resists their attacks while it is healthy, as long as it has within it the juices that can devour and dissolve these intruders. But let but one bubble of another family wander into these billions, against which your body, your blood, your saliva, has no resistance, and within a short time it reproduces in your body and around you, poisons your blood and the air that you breathe. You, a giant, will then fall victim to this miserable microbes. Microbes piled into millions are still invisible to the naked eye. This is the second half of my verdict. To these tiny creatures you will all be subjected, all of you, people and animals. If by any chance some disastrous new breed should strike, you will all die helplessly in the thousands and millions. Only when you find methods to fight them, then... well, then you will not need to seek justice among yourselves."

The king waved a hand in farewell and everyone left.

From that time on the animals have never again take Man into court.



A FABLE ABOUT FABLES

I

"But these are all fables!" cried the children in one voice, when I had finished telling them all that is written in this book.

"Yes, children, fables. And do you know what a fable is?"

"Yes, we do. It's something that isn't true."

"Oho! And who told you such a thing?"

"We thought that out all by ourselves."

"Then think again. Now isn't it the truth that the Wolf eats the Ram, the Fox the Chicken, and the Owl — the Birds?"

"Sure, it's the truth. But you told us that the Vixen was digging in

the field and ate buns with honey, that the Wolf rode a Donkey into a village, hoping to become reeve, that the Raven carried a firebrand and started a fire and all kinds of other such nonsense. These things are not possible."

"Well, if they weren't possible, why did you listen?"

"Why did we listen? Because it was interesting."

"What was interesting about it? How can something so untrue be interesting?"

"Because that which isn't true is the most interesting! It's so funny to think of a Wolf becoming reeve, that a Fox sat in a barrel of paint..."

"But if I started to tell you that the Wolf flew in the air, that the Fox swam in the water, that the Cat lives in a burrow under the ground, would you think that would be the truth, or not?"

"An untruth, of course!"

"But would it be interesting?"

"Of course not!"

"That means that not all that's untrue is interesting?"

"That's right, not all."

"Well then, tell me which untruth is interesting?"

The children sat and thought for a while. Their little heads were busy, their eyes shone, but their thoughts wouldn't jell.

"Let's take a couple of sketches so we can better understand. We'll draw a Ram here with six feet. What do you think, would that be a real Ram?"

"No."

"Would he be funny?"

"No again."

"Right. This is a crippled Ram and the sight of a cripple arouses pity, not laughter. Now look at this sketch — a Donkey playing a piano. Is this true?"

"Of course not!"

"Is it funny?"

"Even very funny."

"What's so funny about it?"

"Because the Donkey is doing something that only people can do."

"All people?"

"Not even all people. Those who can play can do it, but those who can't..."

"Those last, I believe, have been called something at times?"

"Yes, they have often been called donkeys."

"There, you see? Now we have come to the root! It means that there are donkeys among people?"

"That's right."

"That means that when I draw a Donkey at a piano it is not altogether an untruth! Now, what do you think — are there not among people many who have animal characteristics — plundering Wolves, cunning Foxes, good-natured Elephants, deceitful Ravens, aggressive Owls?"

"They say that there are."

"So you see! That means that in talking about the animals I was not wholly untruthful. Of course, a true Cat would not recite religious verses, but is there not more than one smooth-tongued man who says such words while working for the destruction of mankind? A real Donkey would not sit at a piano, but how many two-legged donkeys there are at pianos or other musical instruments who generally try to do things which they can't, which they shouldn't even attempt! That means, my dear children, that it is not the fable that tells the untruth that is interesting, but one that under the guise of untruth hides an ordinary great truth in talking, as it were, about animals, and raises an eyebrow at people as if telling them:

"Now Brothers, why are you laughing? What is being said is not really about the poor Rams, Wolves or Donkeys, but about you, yourselves, with your stupidity, your indolence, your greed, with all your animal whims and caprices. I'm deliberately giving them your movements, your thoughts, your words, so that you would better understand — not them, but yourselves!"

"Well, it's probably not exactly the way you're telling it," spoke up a little older lad. "If it was the way you tell it, then these fables should be told only to older folk so that they would recognize their faults. But children, of course, don't have these faults, so why do they need them? In the meantime fables are never told to older people and they don't even like to listen to them, only children do. For children there must be something more interesting in them."

Don't you think that young lad was wise in what he said? One could see that he thought well and knew how to come to a conclusion.

"And what do you think, my dears," I asked in return, "should young children be given dry bread to eat, roast beef and cabbage?"

"No, they would get ill. They are given cereals and milk."

"There, you see! The naked and full truth of life — it's an unsuitable nourishment for children. Adults eat this food, for them it is healthy and tasty. But it cannot be given to children in the same way,

it has to be prepared in a more diluted way, in sketches and in fables. And children like them that way. Another thing. Children love animals, feel close to them, talk to them and understand them. That's why stories about animals are so interesting to them, especially if these animals in the fables begin to talk, think, and act like people. A long time ago, when people were still simple, uneducated, with a child's mind, they also loved fables as much as children do today."

"I love fables very much because my mother tells them so well, so simply and with such a nice choice of words," said a little schoolgirl.

"That's right, children. This is a great truth. Those simple village folk tales, like tiny slender roots, implant in our souls a love for our native tongue, for its beauty, its simplicity, its magic melody. There will be thousands of things that you'll forget in your lifetime, but the moments when your beloved mother or grandmother told you fables, you will remember till death."

"But it is said that there are people who wish to take our language away from us, deny us the right to think and speak in our native tongue. Can this possibly be true?"

"It's the truth, children. There are such people. It is like a needle in their eye that we are here on earth. They would be happy if we weren't here, and they'd do everything they can to cancel us out if they could. But they always remind me of that Titmouse who was preparing to set fire to the sea."

"Oh, oh, oh! So the Titmouse was preparing to burn the sea? Now what for, and how?"

"Then listen children, to how it was."



II

Once upon a time there was a Titmouse. What she was thinking of is not known, but she took it into her head to build her nest on a small stump on the very edge of the sea. While the sea was quiet, all was well. The Titmouse laid her eggs and began to sit on them. But suddenly a high wind came up and the sea rose in huge waves, submerging

the little stump together with the Titmouse's nest. The Titmouse herself barely escaped with her life and her precious eggs flowed away with the waves.

Oy, oy, oy, but the Titmouse was angry! She sat herself on the cliff over the sea and did she scold and curse at the sea!

"You terrible and wretched sea! You gloomy and ignorant force! You greedy, bottomless abyss! You useless, unnecessary, dirty sea! How dared you destroy my home and take my eggs! I'll take you to court, I will! I'll shame you before the whole world! I'll give you no peace by day or by night, until you return to me what you have taken!"

But the sea only went splish-splash, splish-splash, splish-splash. "What? Are you laughing at me, you dishonourable, dishonest, ignoble sea!" screeched the Titmouse. "Give me back my eggs immediately, or by God I'll revenge myself on you!"

But the sea still went splish-splash, splish-splash, splish-splash.

"You think that I won't be able to take revenge? You think that because I'm so small and you're so big, that I'm helpless against you? But haven't you ever seen, you ignorant sea, how a small spark in a huge forest, when it is ignited, destroys it? If you don't return my eggs at once, then by God, I'll set you on fire!"

But the sea continued to splish-splash, splish-splash, splish-splash.

The Titmouse then grew terribly angry and decided not to rest till she had set the sea on fire. She flew to the Firefly and said to him:

"Listen, Firefly, you have a spark on your stomach. Come with me and help me set fire to the sea."

"I can't, Titmouse," answered the Firefly. "My spark lights up at night, but it doesn't warm, nor does it set fires. You must go to the Will-o'-the-wisp, maybe he'll be able to help you."

The Titmouse flew out over the marsh, sat herself on an alder tree stump and waited until the Will-o'-the-wisp came close. There were several of them flitting about over the marsh, but they flew around unsteadily, as if they were drunk. Finally, one flew near the Titmouse.

"Hey, Brother Flame!" the Titmouse shouted at him. "Stop for a moment, I want to tell you something."

"I can't stop, I have no time," answered the Will-o'-the-wisp.

"But go ahead and tell me what you want to tell me and I'll roam about by the stump and hear everything."

The Titmouse told him all about her sorrow and begged:

"Do come and help me set fire to that terrible sea!"





"I can't, Titmouse," answered the Will-o'-the-wisp. "I was born here on the marsh and I have to die here. Added to that I cannot stop to rest even for a moment, so that I couldn't even light a candle. But why don't you go and ask the Raven? He's a master at such things. Why, I heard that he burned the entire Owl people in a cave. Go to him."

The Titmouse flew to the Raven, told him the whole story, and asked him to help her in her sorrow and set the sea on fire.

"I can't, Titmouse," answered the Raven, shaking his head with dignity. "The fire that burned up the Owls was a simple, human fire that I stole from over there in the pasture. This fire will not burn the sea. One would need a different fire, but where to find it, I have no idea. You know what, go to the Stork. They say he can start a marvellous flame with his beak. Maybe he'll be able to help you?"

The Titmouse thanked the Raven for his advice and flew off to find the Stork. She told him about everything and begged that he trouble himself to strike a fire with his beak so that she could set fire to the sea.

"I can't do this, Titmouse," answered the Stork. "Long ago, our grandparents and great-grandparents, so it is said, knew how to strike fires with their beaks, but we have lost this knowledge. I would think, that to burn the sea, one would need fire from heaven itself. Go to the Eagle. He flies right up to the sun every day and is well-acquainted with heavenly regions. Perhaps he could help you?"

The Titmouse bowed to the Stork and flew to the Eagle. Flying along she kept thinking:

"Just wait, you terrible, unkind sea! I'll show you what a simple, wronged Titmouse can do! I'd not be myself if you didn't pay dearly for your thievery!"

She flew up to the Eagle, told him her wrongs and begged, bowing low at his feet:

“I hope you, heaven preserve you, Your Excellency, won’t scorn a poor, wronged Titmouse, but find me the heavenly fire so I could burn that wretched sea and revenge myself for my heavy wrongs.”

But the Eagle, after having heard her out, raised his wings into such a flap and let out such a screech that the Titmouse forgot whether she was alive or not.

“Why, you good-for-nothing Titmouse! Who told you to build your nest on the seashore? Who told you to quarrel with the sea? Because of your stupidity, I’m supposed to steal fire from heaven? Get out of my sight immediately! Build your nest over there in the thornbushes on the mound, lay your eggs and hatch them, understand? That’s your wretched right, you have no business with the sea!”

Having received this resolution, the Titmouse quieted down, and a few weeks later she truly had a new nest and new eggs this time not on the seashore, but in the thornbush on the mound.





ИВАН ЯКОВЛЕВИЧ ФРАНКО
КОГДА ЗВЕРИ УМЕЛИ ГОВОРТЬ

Сказки

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